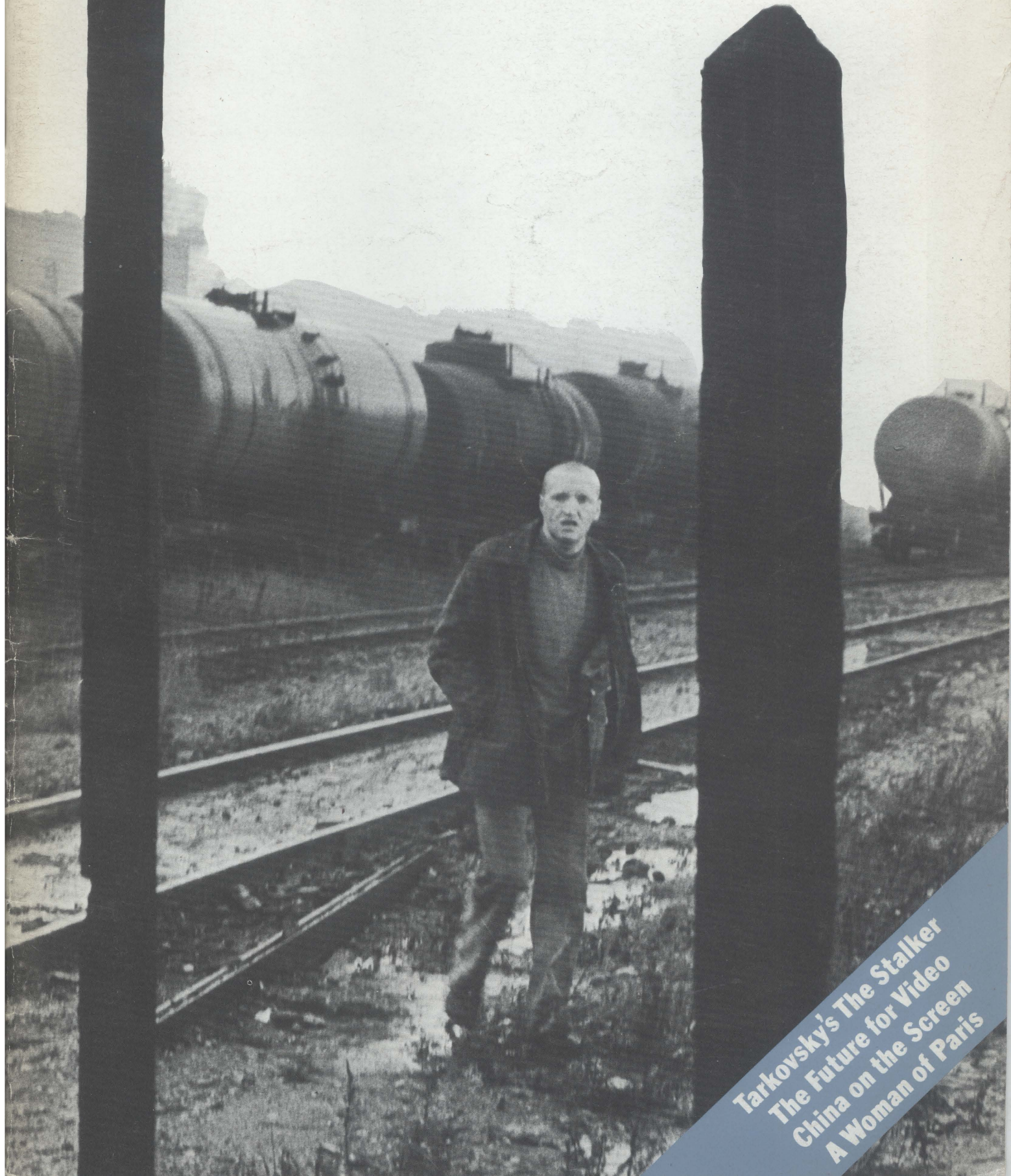


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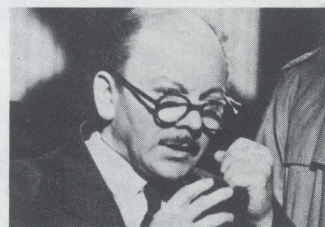


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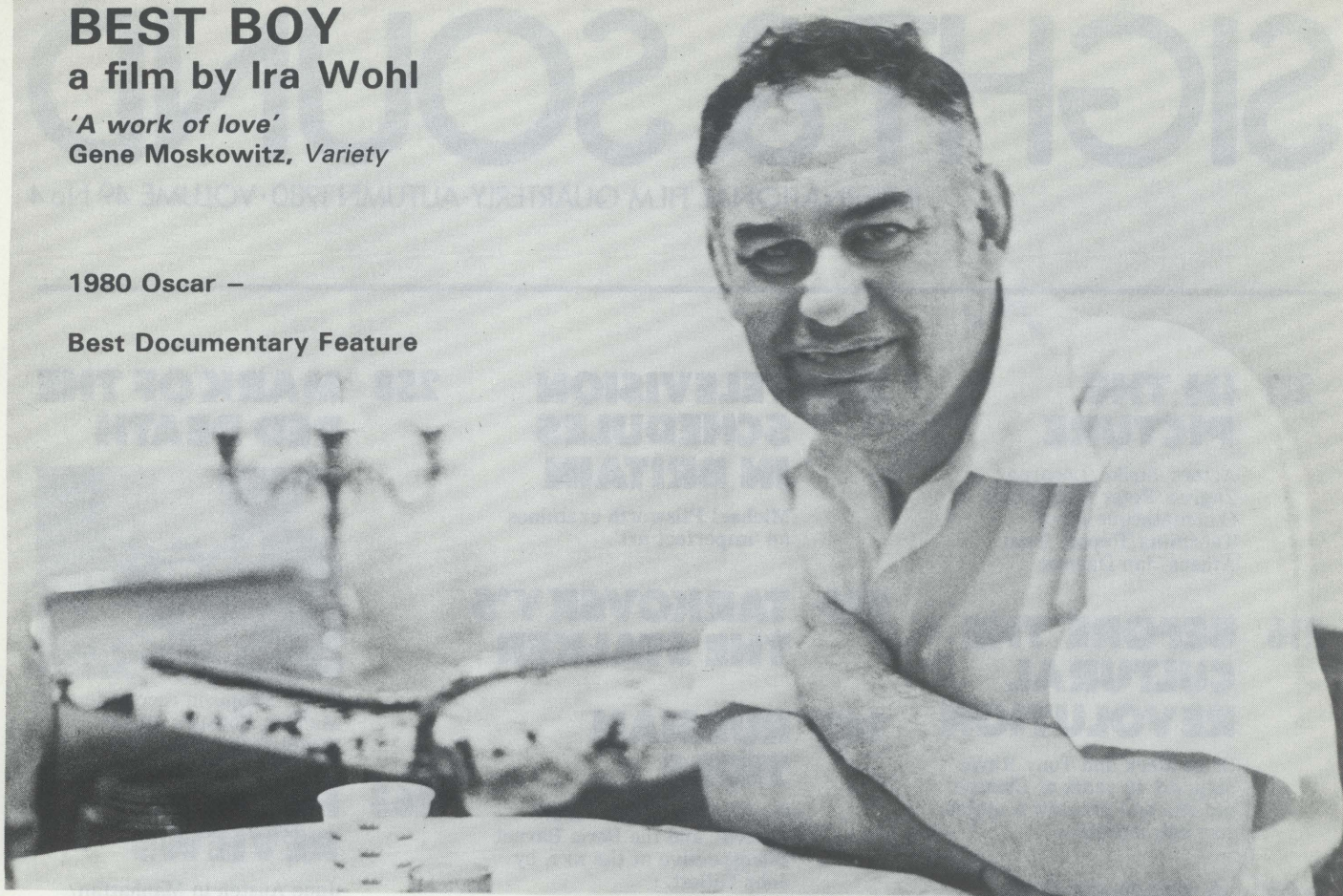
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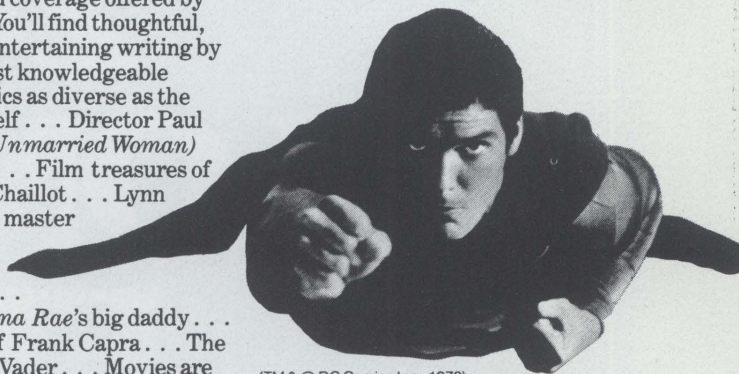
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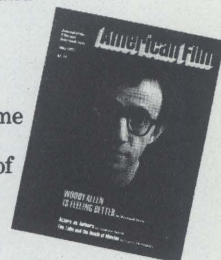


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TOP LEFT: How do directors overcome technical difficulties like photographing a dancer Singin' in the Rain?

LEFT: What are today's films saying about the changing rules of love, marriage, fidelity, friendship?

TOP RIGHT: Is merchandising of spinoffs more important to commercial success than the film itself?

(Columbia Pictures)



(The Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive)

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The 1980 LFF will repeat history by presenting as its opening film Kurosawa's *KAGEMUSHA*, joint prizewinner of the Grand Prize at Cannes this year.

Other films in the 24th London Film Festival by well known directors include Wajda's *THE CONDUCTOR*, Satyajit Ray's *THE KINGDOM OF DIAMONDS*, Franju's *THE LAST MELODRAMA*, Kluge's *THE PATRIOT*, Mrinal Sen's *AND QUIET ROLLS THE DAWN*,



ABOVE. Akira Kurosawa at the NFT in 1957, with Gina Lollobrigida and Vittorio De Sica.

Loach's *THE GAMEKEEPER*, Wiseman's *MODEL*, and Terayama's *LABYRINTH IN THE FIELD*.

There will also be special sections on Action Films, British Independent cinema, New Directors and this year the focus will be on American Independent Films, with approximately 20 features to be screened.

Apart from *KAGEMUSHA*, we also hope to show the Grand Prize Winners from Berlin, Taormina, San Remo and other festivals.

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BELOW. Kurosawa directing *Kagemusha*.

United artists

*The us actors' strike:
a stand on share-outs from
the new technology*

'Some new approaches as to how we get paid for creative services.' Those were deceptively mild words in June from Chester L. Migden, national executive secretary of America's Screen Actors Guild (SAG) and the union's chief negotiator. Seven weeks later, 5,000 members of SAG and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA), including all Hollywood's household names, called a strike which even in its early stages was estimated to be costing the motion picture industry \$40,000,000 a week.

Migden was more forthright in his speech to employers at the start of the June talks. 'You'd like us to wait ten years, and we can't,' he told them. 'We must insure our right to share now. History and experience have made us sadder and wiser. We're still trying to catch up to the last wave of new technology.'

That 'right to share' was the crucial, innovative demand which from the start accorded the confrontation a place in industry history. It set a precedent for all future negotiations in the West on disposal of income from the so-called supplemental markets—pay-TV, video-cassettes and video-discs. The actors wanted no residuals scaled to original salaries, not performing rights fees such as composers receive, not just profit shares (with producers determining whether and when there are profits to share), but a percentage of 'absolute gross', that is, a share in all revenue from pay-TV and videogram exploitation from the first dollar, plus guaranteed ('as you go') payments against that percentage.

Looked at in one way, every actor was asking to be treated like, or better than, the top echelon of stars, a few of whom can insist on being cut into gross rather than net profits, and even fewer on participation in 'absolute gross'. But the ostensible privilege was being demanded on only part of the studios' overall revenue and, looked at another way, actors merely wanted the same protection against the impact of America's cantering inflation as their employers, who can raise admission charges, increase the cost of commercials time and push up selling prices without formal negotiations with anyone.

However equitable the twelve per cent share initially sought by SAG and AFTRA, the principle at stake produced remarkable solidarity among performers. By the time Billy H. Hunt, head of the producers' all-industry negotiating team, returned to the table on 16 July, after a two-week recess following stalemate in the June

talks, he faced two defiant opponents. Migden and AFTRA negotiator Sanford Wolff were already armed with mandates, voted overwhelmingly by all regional branches of both unions, to order a strike if a new industry contract was not agreed by midnight four days later.

Some concessions were made before the deadline. For one, the unions halved their proposed share of supplemental markets to six per cent. The producers for their part accepted the principle of participation, offering 3.6 per cent in reply, but Migden challenged their suggested compensation formula as likely to be 'fictional... a mirage'. At the end of the marathon weekend session, attended by a federal mediator, he still described the chasm between the two sides as 'deep and fundamental'. On Monday 21 July, the actors officially walked out, and the talks broke down.

Beside the central, radical issues raised by the fact that pay-TV and domestic video greatly extend the earning life of a feature film or TV movie, the bargaining on more familiar issues tended to pale. But even on regular wage rises across the board, and on a complex package of pension and welfare deals, the tune of union demands was more than familiarly militant.

SAG's original pursuit of a 40 per cent increase in basic rates was tempered during the immedi-

ate pre-strike discussions to 35 per cent, but management attempts to negotiate terms spread over several years—Hunt offered 8.4 per cent for the first year of a three-year contract—were stubbornly resisted: performers wanted the whole lot right away. Migden pointed out that the cost of living index had risen almost 37 per cent since July 1977; and he continually berated producers for a historical record of stalling pay reviews and refusing for twenty years to entertain a rethink on revenues from, for example, feature films licensed to TV—a supplemental market now seen to be of immense value. Since the last actors' strike in 1960 (not counting last year's walk-out, which was specifically related to commercials), SAG members' percentages of TV sales remained unchanged at 3.6 per cent, the level offered for new markets.

Although the strike was characterised at the outset by press conferences held by each party in turn to justify its own position, it was soon apparent that management was, as a SAG rallying circular to its members claimed, 'toughing it out' and saying little. Some 1,500 actors, with obvious celebrity appeal on their side, staged a flamboyant demonstration at Burbank Studios which rapidly put them in the media forefront. Meanwhile, Hunt and his colleagues had fresh problems

in the form of a threatened stoppage by the 300,000-strong American Federation of Musicians.

That development escalated the stand-off between Hunt and Migden. The musicians held a gun at producers' heads by insisting on a strike deadline no later than the expiry of the current AFM contract: midnight, 31 July, eleven days into the SAG-AFTRA strike. Hunt was inevitably accused of using one dispute (with AFM) as a pretext for turning his back on the other, although in a rare interview with *Variety* he maintained readiness to resume talks if, and only if, Migden would compromise on the supplemental markets issue. Migden's refusal to budge was foregone, not least because a second walk-out could only add strength to the actors' position. The musicians struck, and while Hunt denied the two disputes were linked, the impression that management had failed to avert a major industrial relations crisis was widespread.

On the other hand, the line taken by the technicians' union, IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees), was resolutely circumspect. Although the halt in production caused massive lay-offs among its members, IATSE was officially prevented from taking anything but a non-committal stance by undertakings against sympathetic action written into its film and TV agreements. But president Walter Diehl was hotly critical of SAG and AFTRA for not consulting technicians before paralysing the industry. Further, his rejection of a 30 per cent raise in his own pay, recommended by membership at the union's annual conference (but 'we haven't the money,' he said), was an implied general acknowledgment of a need to curb large wage increases.

SAG and AFTRA in fact took steps to offset the ripple effect of the strike on other workers—at the same time clearly identifying the studios as the main targets of the confrontation—by signing interim agreements on a case by case basis to allow certain productions to continue. Green lights were given to independent companies able to prove that they themselves had a 'very substantial' financial or ownership stake in a picture. Sensibly, from a public relations point of view, the unions wasted no time in getting agreements under way: sixteen features and ten TV movies received go-aheads in the strike's first week, with producers thereby agreeing to accept the eventual terms of the new industry contract. If there was one general observation to be made on this episode in Hollywood history, it was that the actors had the best lines, made the best moves, and handled their promotion a good deal more effectively than the producers.

SIMON PERRY

Still working: Meryl Streep, in Britain to star in 'The French Lieutenant's Woman' for Karel Reisz. The adaptation of John Fowles' novel is by Harold Pinter.



IN THE PICTURE



Niklaus Schilling's 'Der Willi-Busch-Report'.

Locarno

Questions of identity: movies in exile in neutral Switzerland

Some films seem to be made in order to be shown only at festivals; others have this sad, vaguely distinguished kind of exile thrust upon them. Sadder still, one would think, are those films which circulate to festivals like Locarno, where they appear like players in provincial rep, and look as if they might well go into mothballs once the tourist season is over. Given the resort atmosphere, the feeling that the films are but one of the diversions available, the festival's organisers have a hard time creating a sense of event, let alone of identity. Locarno is small without being intimate; the central programme seems to represent variously 'humanitarian' causes but not much diversity in the art; and as the main attraction unfolds each evening on the outdoor screen in the Piazza Grande, before a frequently large throng of the local smart set, holiday-makers and journalists, it never seems more than a happy accident that film and audience have got together.

If ever there was a festival-only film, it was the one which opened the thirty-third such event at Locarno. *Polenta* is the first feature of Maya Simon, granddaughter of Michel Simon, and stars Bruno Ganz, perhaps 'the' European actor of the moment. It takes place, however, in an anonymously snowy wasteland, from which God of course has fled (taking man's reason with

him) and where characters are either interacting symbolically or struggling basically to survive. Forgetfulness, in an unending supply of wine, is at least not one of their problems.

Another first feature, the British entry *Breaking Glass*, is guaranteed a life after the festival. But its view of contemporary Britain might have been calculated to make its greatest impact in just such an exotic international context. This is an emblematic pop film, written and directed by the admired TV docu-dramatist Brian Gibson, in which an anarchic punk spokesperson (Hazel O'Connor) becomes first an effectively raunchy performer and then a carefully packaged commodity. Gibson's fulsomely stylised account of Britain on the verge of economic breakdown, cultural schism and social upheaval will inevitably look more suspect on its home ground. And anyone trying to read its sociological message will encounter not a little interference from its *Star Is Born* storyline.

A film like *Polenta* seems to be quite wilfully in search of its own art-house ghetto. A more interesting—if only because more inadvertent—prisoner of this festival limbo is the much-contested *Caligula*, which turned up in the market having passed earlier this year through the Berlin Festival (though it has opened in the meantime in the States). Its most remarkable feature is that, after considerable litigation as to ownership and responsibility, it is credited with neither writer nor director. Gore Vidal, whose name was once part of the title (Gore Vidal's *Caligula* was to be his

proof that the writer not the director was a film's true auteur), now merely provides the original screenplay on which the film was 'based', and director Tinto Brass winds up with a credit for 'principal photography'. There might be some curiosity value in the film's mixture of 'serious' actors with hard-core pornography, except that Peter O'Toole and John Gielgud rapidly contrive to disappear—perhaps discovering, along with Gore Vidal, that discretion is the better part of auteurism.

Caligula, however, may not have been the only, or even the most dispiriting sign of decadence at the festival. At the press conferences, *Breaking Glass* was inevitably upbraided for its commercial compromise; but more agitated questions were asked of René Allio who, after his radical exercise in anti-narrative, *Moi, Pierre Rivière*, produced a more conventional treatment of bourgeois tragedy in *Retour à Marseille*, about a middle-aged man (Raf Vallone) who returns to his home town for a funeral, only to find himself confronting his own past. The *recherche du temps perdu* might, in fact, have been taken as the general theme of the festival. Its best example was the Italian *Maledetti vi amerò*, in which a veteran of '68 returns from a sojourn in South America to find not only the ideals of yesteryear forgotten but any sense of the need for struggle—surrendered, among other things, to drug addiction, cinéphilism and the marketing of fashionable knick-knacks. Marco Tullio Giordana's direction is at once lush and pointed, pushing towards the social insights of Francesco Rosi, while his characters are self-obsessively inclined, à la Bertolucci/Bellocchio.

If there was one problem which was most germane to Locarno, however, it was probably the crisis of being Swiss. Although Swiss films were in evidence (including the rigorously unidentifiable *Polenta*), it was regretted that the country's lack of linguistic autonomy meant that two of its German-speaking film-makers produced two of the most interesting films as entries from the Federal Republic of Germany. *Der Willi-Busch-Report* takes a while to get going, and dawdles indecisively to its conclusion, but in between spins a sharp, funny tale on the borders of political paranoia about a local newspaper struggling to survive since its readership was cut in half by the division of East and West. The hero, begoggled, working his border beat in a three-wheeled runabout, contrives ever-larger scandals to revive the flagging rag (beginning with his own exploits as a telephone vandal), until his inventions begin convincingly coming home to roost. Niklaus Schilling rather over-applies the surface eccentricity, but captures

something comically apt about the mind (and the country) trying to reconcile contradictory realities. Sheer entertainment takes the day in *So weit das Auge reicht*, a somewhat looney murder and double-cross saga in the Patricia Highsmith mould, which begins in a German stock exchange (the only evident connection with the economic analysis of director Erwin Keusch's *Baker's Bread*) before its hero, a deaf, would-be imitator of Bob Dylan, is led a merry chase to the deserts of Nevada and a bleak French isle by four villainous inheritance-hunters.

RICHARD COMBS

Zagreb

Derek Hill discovers a Tarkovsky of animation

Zagreb's Fourth International Animated Film Festival was dominated by Jurij Norstein's *The Tale of Tales* (*Skazka-Skazok*), a half-hour film which won the Soviet Union the Grand Prix. It may well be the finest animated film I have ever seen. It is certainly the most complex—and the hardest to describe. Norstein summarises it simply as 'a story which meditates on the transience of time and the memories which remain.' The nearest comparison that can be made is with Tarkovsky—and particularly with *Mirror*. Norstein offers the same richness and poetry in an equally elusive, hypnotic manner.

Animals and mythological beasts people Norstein's landscapes of family life on an equal footing with the humans. A minotaur takes turns at a skipping rope with a child. A giant fish spans a cat with his tail. And the sometimes tender, sometimes bleak sequences are linked by an enigmatic dog-like creature who bakes himself potatoes on an open fire at night while armistice celebrations light up the sky. A war has been conjured up by a passing train, men disappearing from a dance, the menace of gliding, robed figures. Two viewings only make one long to see the extraordinary work again and again. It has exactly the quality of a memory which might or might not have been a dream. The images are often worthy of a Picasso, and the delicacy of much of the animation has surely never been equalled.

It was right that such a revelation of the potential of animation should happen at Zagreb, where there is such an exceptional willingness to recognise and support talent without any national bias. The pre-selection and official juries were authentically international, the organisation impeccable, and the hospitality as warm and as witty as one has come to expect from a town whose coat of arms features a city gate wide open in welcome. (Where else

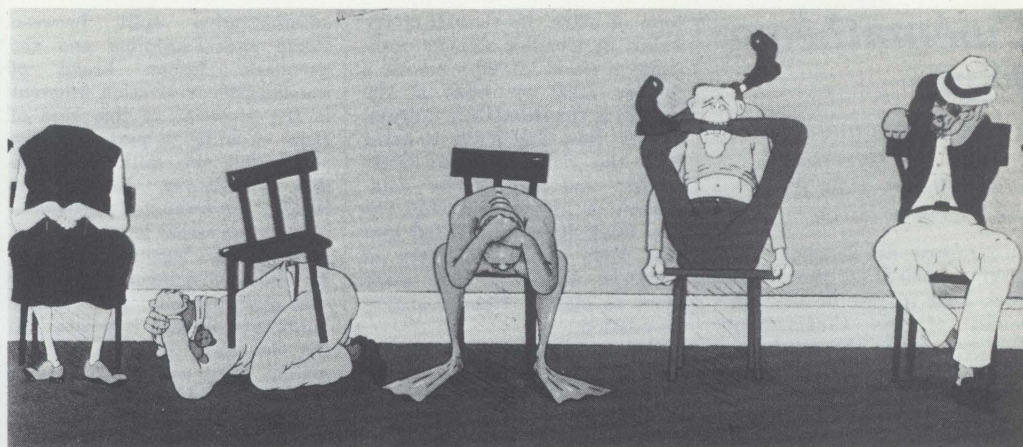
would festival signposts suggest a detour through the botanical gardens en route to the cinema?) Zagreb was host to the first extraordinary general meeting of ASIFA, the animators' international body; it also offered useful retrospectives of Yugoslav animation from artists outside Zagreb's own celebrated team, and select programmes of the best of the other animation festivals.

The final night at Zagreb, with an admirable programme of prize-winners presented to an audience of more than 1,200 jammed into every crevice of the Student Centre cinema, was as invigorating as any animation event I've known. Given such a setting, it seemed sad that ASIFA couldn't come up with something better than its own leadenly inadequate definition: 'The art of animation is the creation of moving images through the manipulation of all varieties of techniques apart from live action methods.'

That definition sounds almost as if it was concocted by the lineup in Paul Dreissen's hilarious *Elbowing*, a joyously original comedy in which gormlessly conformist figures solemnly nudge each other over a cliff, defeated solely by an anarchic clown who seems oblivious not only to their rules but to every natural law. Dreissen's doodles have been a source of glee to a relatively tiny audience for years. *Elbowing*, where every frame and each preposterous eruption on the soundtrack has a perfection all its own, should multiply his admirers by several million.

Britain was given more recognition by the jury than any other country, though three of its four prize-winners had already been acclaimed elsewhere—Geoffrey Dunbar's magnificently outrageous *Ubu*, Oscar Grillo's brilliantly animated *Seaside Woman*, and the best from John Halas for many years, *Autobahn*. The surprise was Andy Walker's *Filling Time*, one of a series of six 'Animated Conversations' emanating from BBC Bristol which the Beeb have mysteriously chosen to transmit as secretly as only they know how. Genuine conversations were recorded for this series and then edited down to give individual animators springboards for their own interpretations. Andy Walker triumphed with a horror show of dentistry at total odds with the practitioner's consoling chat, and won a special mention for graphics. In another in the series Peter Lord and David Sproxton use clay animation to reveal the absolute mystification of someone convinced that a Salvation Army hostel captain somehow stands between him and a meal. The BBC must be persuaded that this series is among their increasingly rare productions that they should trumpet and celebrate, not sneak out as merely useful fillers.

DEREK HILL



Andy Walker's 'Filling Time', shown at Zagreb.

Poster Artist

Peter Strausfeld, who since the war had designed posters for the Academy Cinema, died in July

The death of the designer Peter Strausfeld brought to an end a long and distinguished episode in the history of British film advertising. For more than thirty-five years Strausfeld had created the distinctive posters that advertised the programmes of the Academy Cinemas.

Born in Cologne in 1911, and driven into exile by Hitler, Strausfeld met George Hoellering when the two dedicated opponents of Nazism were interned together in the Isle of Man, in the official xenophobia of the early war years. Afterwards, when Hoellering returned to the Academy—he remained Managing Director until his death in February at 82—he commissioned the first of the posters that were eventually to number well over 300. Strausfeld remembered this first poster as being for *The Forgotten Village*: other early designs were for *Open City* and *Paisa*. The first posters were printed on bookbinders' linen because of the paper shortage and were small in format—the Academy had not yet adopted Underground advertising, and posters were stuck on the readily available bomb sites around London.

Strausfeld chose the unusual medium of the linocut because it was cheap, fast, controllable and ideal for the small runs (around 350 posters) required by the Academy. So from the start the posters acquired their inimitable look—the chunky, stylised illustration and playbill type. Almost invariably he chose to represent the film with portraits of the leading actors, taken from stills, but subtly drawn to interpret the essence. Maybe Strausfeld's Buster (who reappears annually around the London Underground) was a shade too tragic; but Karina (*Vivre sa Vie*) and Arletty (*Les Enfants du Paradis*) were wonderfully exact expressions of

actress and role. Strausfeld's style hardly changed, though he experimented more and more with overlaying coloured blocks; and it was too individualist to date. In a sense, the posters were the Academy.

Strausfeld explained in an article in *Designer* (December 1978): 'I usually saw the film only once. Sometimes I didn't see it at all. When the film came late and the publicity had to be early, I had only a few stills to work from, plus an idea of what it was all about.' When films were revived, so were the posters. The block for the Academy's prime favourite, *Les Enfants du Paradis*, simply wore out in the end.

In the same *Designer* article (to which I am indebted for the story of the Academy posters) Strausfeld complained that it was getting hard to find anyone who would still print linocuts; and hard even to find lino. 'Floor coverings have changed a lot, and I can't use plastic. I did once, because I thought it was lino, and it dissolved in the printing ink.' He speculated that if the supply dried up completely, he'd have to try something else, maybe plywood. It never came to that. And now the era of those posters, which for those of us who grew up in London were part of our film culture, is over.

DAVID ROBINSON



PAISA (A) THE ROBERTO ROSSELLINI PRIZE-WINNING FILM

One of the earliest of Peter Strausfeld's distinctive poster designs for the Academy.

Cinémathèque Fire

A fire in a converted garage has destroyed some 40,000 reels from the Paris archive

On 3 August, fire destroyed some 5,000 to 7,000 films, about 40,000 reels, held in one of the warehouses of the Cinémathèque Française. After the smoke had cleared, and the many newspaper articles written about it, it appeared that the films stored in this converted garage at Villiers-Saint-Frédéric, near Versailles, were not irreplaceable, as many had claimed. Rather, they were mainly extra copies, out-takes, or in general films that the late Henri Langlois, creator of the Cinémathèque Française, had just not wanted to throw away. Mary Meerson, Langlois' long-time colleague, says that he always felt no film should be destroyed: it could always be used for some needed scenes, or towards the rehabilitation of names which might not have received just assessment from the historians.

Inevitably, the fire brought rumours about treasures supposedly squirreled away by Langlois. Cinémathèque executives, however, claim that the whereabouts of most of his film stores were known; and Mary Meerson says that, with two theatres to be programmed, there is regular transport to and from the various stores. But it is true that Langlois had refused to use the film storage centre at Bois d'Arcy, built by the government mainly to house the Cinémathèque treasures. When he was fired during the upheavals of 1968, and later reinstated after a world outcry, he felt that the government was trying to get its hands on his precious collection—which also included many films stored on behalf of producers, and not Cinémathèque property.

Estimates of the size of the collection vary between 17,000 and 70,000 films. The Cinémathèque now has the task of saving and restoring the films; and because of the immense costs involved there will have to be some process of selection, even though this offends against Langlois' precepts. Langlois himself had been working on plans for a special storage depot at the time of his death in 1977. This was lost. But the fire has at least drawn attention to the need for suitable storage space and more government aid towards restoration, like the National Film Archive programme in Britain.

The Cinémathèque derives two-thirds of its operating costs from the government but remains a private concern dedicated to public service. It has a new president, M Michel Guy, a former Minister of Culture who helped the Cinémathèque with funds during his

term of office. Its theatre at the Palais de Chaillot attracts audiences of about 12,000 a month; a further 7,000 see films at the theatre in the Beaubourg Cultural Centre. Now Guy wants to bring back the visits by great world names, and the young filmmakers, as in the days when the new wave directors insisted that they were all 'the children of Langlois'. There are also plans afoot to start a Henri Langlois foundation.

Georges Franju, who worked with Langlois in the 30s on the creation of the Cinémathèque, says that the problem is no longer one of acquiring films but of storing them. This is the graveyard work of the archivist, while the Cinémathèque keeps films alive by screening them. In the aftermath of the fire, it may become easier to balance the two functions. Charges against Langlois, concerning his supposed spending and hoarding of films, may be laid to rest when the listing of his collection is completed; and old antagonisms between Cinémathèque regulars and the new people on the board ironed out as the Cinémathèque moves into a more public phase.

GENE MOSKOWITZ

Taormina

A potential forum for first-time directors

The return to competition of the Venice Biennale hangs over the future of the Taormina Festival as substantially as Mount Etna looms over the town. The festival this year seemed in transition, but gave several signs of what its new role might be. It still clearly faces a host of difficulties: the scattering of participants among hotels along the coast and in the town, perched in the hills above; an

administration split between Rome and Taormina; and the peculiarly Italian brand of bureaucratic frustration inherent in the financing of this kind of event. Coming in part from the state, and the bulk from the Sicilian Tourist Board, the budget—an estimated £300,000—is approved rather late in the day, creating more logistical problems for director Guglielmo Biraghi. Of this generous sum, a seemingly inordinate amount is devoted to the last-night spectacle, a razzmatazz affair somewhat at odds with the festival's overall aims.

But if the revival of Venice means that FIAF will in future approve competition for first works only at Taormina, then this year's trial emphasis on first-time directors bodes well, with all but two of the *Cariddi* (prizes) going to newcomers. The main prize winner, *The Blood of Hussain*, a first feature directed by Jamil Dehlavi, a Pakistani now in exile, was distinguished by some memorable sequences—including a horse emerging from the ground in slow motion, and startling documentary footage of the self-flagellation of Shi'ite Moslems mourning the martyrdom of Hussain, the Prophet's grandson—in an otherwise disjointed narrative with overt symbolic parallels between its contemporary hero and his historical namesake.

Chris Petit's *Radio On*, already much hailed, received the Special Jury Prize, last given in 1978 to Herzog's *Stroszek*. A French film, *Anthracite*, fluently directed by Edouard Niermans, the semi-autobiographical tale of an adolescent 'marginalised' in a Jesuit college, fully deserved its Special Mention. Ralph Waite, one of the stalwarts of the *Waltons* TV series, also collected a Special Mention for *On the Nickel*, his sensitive depiction of alcoholism on skid row. Finally, Damiano

Damiani received a Special Mention for *L'Avvertimento*, a finely constructed but slightly conventional exercise in the 'honest cop fighting high-level corruption' mould.

But the Competition is only one of Taormina's three separate but interacting sections. The New Cinema section provides the festival's rationale and is considered by most Italians to be its real function. Critics may see the films in this section at morning screenings in Taormina, but its actual venue is Messina, and thus festival-goers tend to miss its real context: first, the ciné-club circuit in Messina, and then a tour of Sicily, with obscure or difficult films—this year, for instance, the section included five Polish films—often being screened in villages which don't even boast a cinema.

Thus, one of the most startling, but often overlooked, aspects of Taormina is its broad audience potential, not only in this touring phase, but also in the impressive amphitheatre, seating some 30,000, where the finale provides the 'glamour' and TV coverage for the presentation of the David di Donatello Awards, Italy's equivalent of the Oscars. This year they went to such 'names' as Tarkovsky and Schlesinger, with Fassbinder belatedly collecting last year's prime award.

Taormina contrives in this way to be a festival for all seasons (or for all purposes), the extravagance of the David Awards existing incongruously alongside the attempted cultural intervention of the New Cinema section, both bound loosely around the traditional format of the Competition section; and the re-emergence of Venice may in the end prove to be a benevolent factor, helping to define more clearly Taormina's particular alchemy.

JO IMESON



Jamil Dehlavi's *'The Blood of Hussain'*, prize-winner at Taormina.

Report from Athens

Attempts to bridge the gap between Greek commercial and independent cinemas

1980 has already proved an eventful year for the Greek cinema, not least for the examples it has presented of the various problems, financial and otherwise, facing local independent directors. Three of the country's most talented film-makers all completed new projects recently. Films by Theodoros Angelopoulos and Nikos Panayotopoulos have yet to be shown; but Pandelis Voulgaris' *Eleftherios Venizelos*, which opened in Athens in February, neatly illustrates some of the difficulties involved.

Voulgaris is the young director whose award-winning *The Engagement of Anna and Happy Day* earned him sufficient reputation to secure the backing of a Greek producer willing to provide almost £500,000 for his film on the life of one of the most important Greek political figures (and popular heroes) of this century. Eleftherios Venizelos was the first prime minister successfully to challenge the power of the monarchy, and the stalwart champion of the rights of the emergent bourgeoisie. Voulgaris was given absolute control over the script, and with the money available was able to attract a number of commercially popular names, among them Melina Mercouri and the composer Manos Hadjidakis. Thus it was hoped, and with good reason, that the film might set a precedent in bridging the hitherto vast gap between the commercial and independent cinemas in Greece.

This failed to happen, however. *Eleftherios Venizelos* was indifferently received by both critics and public, and its run in Athens lasted only a little over a month. The reasons for this concern, inevitably, the difficulties of trying to please too diverse an audience. Commercially, the film was unpopular because it failed to lionise its hero sufficiently—the Venizelos legend is still close to the hearts of many Greeks. Similarly, Voulgaris' attempt to present his protagonist as a psychological enigma—an approach which effectively ignored the more contentious political aspects of his career—seemed to many critics both facile and evasive. Technically polished, and obviously an unusually lavish production, the film is disappointing in many ways. 'A technical perfectionist with some good ideas,' was how one reviewer described Voulgaris, perhaps a little unfairly.

Another eagerly awaited event is the première of Angelopoulos' *O Megas Alexandros* (*Alexander the Great*). Angelopoulos has

undoubtedly been the seminal figure of the modern Greek cinema movement, and the new work, his fifth, promises to be the most ambitious yet. The Alexander of the title actually refers to a Robin Hood-type figure of early 20th century Greece, a bandit who steals from the rich to give to the poor; the story is seen through the eyes of a twelve-year-old boy called, naturally enough, O Mikros Alexandros—'Little Alexander'.

Even a film-maker with an established international reputation cannot be sure of a trouble-free production, given the current precarious state of the Greek film industry, and *Alexander the Great* has had its fair share of problems. After a proposed £50,000 co-production deal with the Greek Cinema Centre had fallen through, Angelopoulos was forced to look elsewhere for sponsors. Turning down several offers to shoot in Italian, he characteristically began filming with a portion of the estimated £250,000 production costs still unprovided for. Work started in January, with freezing temperatures adding to the problems of a crew already struggling with the hardships of filming in a remote rural area. Angelopoulos finally completed shooting in June, with a series of expensive location shots in central Athens which necessitated whole areas of the city's main park being cordoned off from the public. This kind of determined professionalism, regardless of cost or difficulty, comes as no surprise when one remembers that his masterpiece *The Travelling Players* started shooting in Greece during the seven year Junta period, with the distinct possibility that without the fall of the regime it might never be shown.

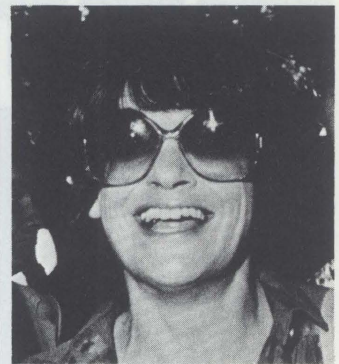
Curiously enough, the issue of film censorship has recently come to the fore again, after the experiences of the director Nikos Panayotopoulos at the hands of the Office of the Minister to the Prime Minister. This is the government department responsible for film censorship. Always highly conscious of Greece's image abroad, and more so at present given her impending accession to the EEC, this office recently took the highly unusual step of banning a proposed film in advance.

The film in question was Panayotopoulos' *Danke Schoen, Bitte Schoen* (*Thank You, You're Welcome*), the script of which was submitted to the Office and promptly refused a production permit. Its subject was to have been the experiences of Greek workers in Germany, the plot concerning the rebellion of son against father in one particular family. Clearly, the possibility of political embarrassment in what is already a sensitive area influenced the government's actions. Despite sharp criticism from sections of the press, the decision was upheld, and Panay-

otopoulos forced to look elsewhere for a subject.

The result of that search is *Melodrama*, which is to be premiered at the Thessaloniki Festival. Panayotopoulos (whose prize-winning *Idlers of the Fertile Valley* was loudly acclaimed by local critics) is reluctant to give details in advance, but he has been quoted as saying that the film will be 'something of an acrobat—striving to maintain a balance between the highly comic/grotesque and the melodramatic/sad.' If this is true, it indicates that he is involving himself in areas avoided by most Greek directors, who are notoriously wary of comedies of any kind. This is at least partially because the comic in Greek cinema has become closely associated in recent years with the commercially successful, and thus, by implication, the artistically redundant. Should *Melodrama* be well received, it might draw attention to the possibilities of exploring new forms of comedy for other Greek directors. And given that local comedies have always been extremely popular with cinema-goers, this in turn might help overcome the indifference of producers unwilling to provide backing for directors whose films (with the exception of Angelopoulos) invariably make substantial losses.

PAUL MANSFIELD



Jan Dawson.

daunting films, and she always wrote with a profound creative sympathy about the intentions of the film-maker, however obscure or difficult these might seem to others. She was, I think, the most purely intellectual critic (who could write in clear, witty and scrupulous prose) that this country has produced. Without being at all doctrinaire she was radical in her political views. Her pieces had a sort of intellectual thrill to them customarily associated far more with French or German criticism, and it is no surprise that she was not only fluent in both these languages but an early and eloquent partisan of the New German Cinema. There was certainly no other British critic who would explain and celebrate a difficult film with such full-blooded and knowledgeable conviction.

But it would be quite wrong to give the impression that Jan was a lover of the pretentious and obscure. She loved the films of Truffaut for example, and my own happiest memories are sitting next to her at a Truffaut press show, and then going for a rapacious drink afterwards while we tumbled out our praise, speculations and excitement.

She was a strict and imaginative editor of the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, and later did an exemplary job at the Berlin Festival producing a bi-lingual daily magazine, *Berlinale-tip*, which mixed weighty exegeses, 'colour' pieces and pertinent interviews. I've rarely seen anyone work so hard in my life, yet she always seemed to have time for a talk with her many friends, both fellow-critics and directors.

I got to know Jan as a friend through Gavin and Sylvia Millar, round whose kitchen table and deep into the night Jan's particular gaiety and articulacy blossomed. She could gossip ferociously, and she could praise unstintingly. It would, I think, be wrong to say that she will be greatly missed as a critic—she was not sufficiently known to be very publicly mourned. But it is true to say that she is irreplaceable in British film culture. There was no other critic who so steadfastly believed in and fought for the right of the cinema to be intellectual.

JULIAN JEBB

Jan Dawson

A tribute to the critic Jan Dawson who died on 29 July, aged 41

Jan Dawson, critic and for thirteen years a valued contributor to this magazine, died at her London home in July. An exhibitor at St. Hilda's College, Oxford, where she took a First in Modern Languages, Jan taught at Berkeley before joining the editorial department of the British Film Institute in 1967. She became editor of the *Monthly Film Bulletin* in 1971, leaving in 1973 to take up freelance writing and translating (her work included a booklet on Alexander Kluge, Faber's English version of *Conversations with Eugene Ionesco* and the English-language screenplay of Truffaut's *Adèle H.*). She contributed to numerous newspapers and periodicals: the Canadian magazine *Take One*; the Australian *Cinema Papers*; the West German *Film-Korrespondenz*; and to the *Listener*, for which she was deputy film critic since 1968. She worked for the festivals at Perth, Australia, and, notably, Berlin; and was engaged at the time of her death on a history of the New German Cinema.

Jan Dawson liked the cinema in the way Chekhov suggested we should like life—as it is and as it ought to be. She wrote with a sort of ecstatic rigour about the most

BEFORE THE C REVOL

Scott Meek and Tony Rayns, organisers of the NFT Retrospective Electric Shadows: 45 Years of Chinese Cinema, visited China last year to view films and meet people in the film industry. Here, they sketch the Chinese cinema context, and introduce some of their choices for the Retrospective.

If ever a national cinema conformed with Sam Fuller's definition of film as a battleground, it's China's. All films inevitably reflect the society in which they are produced, but Chinese films do so more consciously and more consistently than most others, and China has had an exceptionally turbulent history in the twentieth century. Film has been one of the country's most important mass media since the 1920s, and it has been caught up in the struggles at every step, from the KMT's purge of radicals in the 30s to the Gang of Four's persecution of political opponents in the mid-60s. As a result, it's impossible to 'read' a Chinese movie without referring to the national situation at the time it was made.

A Chinese film of the 30s or 40s is a site for a clash of ideologies. Every film, like every novel and every newspaper article, had to have a position on the key issues of the day: whether or not to resist Japanese aggression, what to do about widespread poverty and corruption. If the position was 'progressive', then Kuomintang (KMT) censorship would prevent it from being expressed explicitly; it therefore became implicit, and the audience response completed the intended meaning. Left-wing films of this period were essentially divisive: their emphasis on society's gaps and contradictions (and their refusal to paper them over) was deliberately calculated to polarise reactions.

In the first fifteen years of the People's Republic, cinema became, by contrast, unificatory in spirit. The liberated film industry set out to address the largest

possible audience, including people in the rural areas who had previously had little or no access to cinema. Films showed a determination to confront social problems constructively, from the superstitions and fears of the tradition-bound peasant population to the constant risk of losing sight of the ideals on which the Communist party was founded. At the same time, though, films were subject to all the vagaries and exigencies of shifts in government policy, as in any socialist country. The Hundred Flowers campaign, aimed at China's intellectuals in 1956-57, encouraged film-makers to try new subjects and styles. Two years later, the Great Leap Forward campaign had the same film-makers producing naive and over-optimistic celebrations of breakthroughs in industrial productivity. And when it became evident that the Great Leap was an economic disaster, leaving a high proportion of the population disillusioned and short of food, the film industry came through with its share of morale-boosters, designed to rekindle the idealism of the years after the Communist victory.

Film-making linked as closely as this to government policies can easily be dismissed as 'propaganda', as if that were the last word on its content, angle of approach and relevance in general. To an averagely cynical Westerner, the very term 'propaganda' evokes little but easy answers and fake panaceas. China has undoubtedly made some films that conform with such prejudices: films with revolutionary heroes and heroines of impeccable purity overcoming equally caricatured reactionaries, and films that show society taking to socialism like a gourmet to Peking Duck. Images like this, however, are chiefly characteristic of the films made during the Cultural Revolution under the Gang of Four, in the wake of Jiang Qing's 'radical reform' of the classical opera. Certainly, films like *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* and the dance version of *Red Detachment of Women* (which have had much wider international circulation than most earlier Chinese films, partly because they were the only films being made at the time when the West started to grow interested in 'Third World cinema') were largely responsible for lodging this particular set of stereotypes in the popular mind.

In China, our viewings of movies from the 30s, late 40s, 50s and early 60s

confirmed the fundamental contention of Jay Leyda's book on Chinese cinema, *Dianying*: that China had an accomplished and fascinating film tradition for many years before the Cultural Revolution. It became evident that the socialist cinema of the People's Republic was founded squarely on the left-wing film activity of the preceding decades, and that many important directors, writers, technicians and actors had careers that spanned the years from the subversions of the 30s to the persecutions of the mid-60s. The Cultural Revolution did not merely interrupt this tradition: it sought to obliterate it in its entirety. The swing to 'ultra-leftism', however one interprets its power politics, sanctioned the denigration of virtually all China's established artists, in the area of cinema as in every other, and many key figures were mentally and physically broken or even tortured to death in its name. The retrieval of the past has been in progress for only two years, and it will take many more before the damage is undone.

The China Film Archive, formerly a division of the China Film Corporation, was closed down for twelve years. It reopened (as an autonomous body) towards the end of 1978, and is currently engaged on the massive labour of recataloguing its collection and checking its prints, many of which are still on nitrate stock. For obvious reasons, it is not yet ready to receive visitors, and anyway does not have the staff or facilities to mount screenings of its holdings. The Film Corporation, meanwhile, not only supervises the distribution of new films and the acquisition of films from other countries, but also organises a major programme of re-releases, enabling the Chinese public to acquaint or re-acquaint itself with the riches of the past.

Our exploration of the Chinese cinema heritage was, of course, limited by these factors—as well as by the large gaps in our knowledge of Chinese history and culture and our minimal grasp of the language. We viewed intensively, but saw, finally, only the tiniest percentage of the potentially available films. Our selection for the Retrospective must therefore be considered as no more than a tentative step towards a proper assessment of the Chinese cinema. Our final list comprises 30 full-length features, four short films, and extracts from a further 15 features. We have included a Charles Urban newsreel, showing the

CULTURAL UTION...

streets of Beijing in the late Qing Dynasty; our earliest Chinese-made film dates from 1935, and the most recent is a 1979 production. The great majority of the prints were supplied by the China Film Corporation; the generous co-operation of the BBC (which will bring at least five of the films to a much larger audience in Britain) enriched the selection, and further titles were added from the holdings of the National Film Archive and the Chinese Embassy in London.

In the following notes on individual films featured in the Retrospective, we outline the main conclusions of our researches into the historical development of Chinese cinema, and try to pinpoint what seems to us especially valuable and remarkable in its tradition. Let us stress again that our observations are strictly tentative; much viewing and research remains to be done.

1937 STREET ANGEL

Five men share tumbledown lodgings in one of the poorest areas of Shanghai. Across the road is a teahouse, whose owners have already pressed one adopted 'daughter' into prostitution and have another, younger girl lined up to follow her. One of the men pursues a chaste romance with the girl; another befriends the older prostitute. Around them, life grows harder by the day: businesses fail, money and work get shorter, lawless violence prevails.

The dramatic premises of *Street Angel* are almost startlingly familiar, and so are some of the main elements of the visual style: they derive, like the title, from Frank Borzage. There, though, the resemblance ends. The younger girl is deflowered by one of the teahouse clients; the young man falters in his affection, but soon accepts that circumstances made it inevitable and thinks no less of the girl. The older prostitute tries to escape from her 'parents', but is beaten so severely by their hired thugs that she dies. Two of the men approach a slick, prosperous lawyer to see if there is a way of extricating the younger girl from the teahouse; their social discomfiture in his smart office is played for comedy, and they beat a hasty retreat when they hear what his fees would be, but they have no Parthian shot, nothing to turn the tables



1965: RED CRAG. Yu Lan (centre) in 'the last important film made before the cultural revolution.'



1937: STREET ANGEL

Zhao Dan, Wei Heling and Qian Qianli in the leftist film made in Shanghai shortly before it fell to the Japanese.



1947: THE SPRING RIVER FLOWS EAST

Bai Yang as the first wife, deserted by her ambitious husband.



1956: FAMILY

Sun Daolin as the groom in 'a mature and stylish adaptation of Ba Jin's dynastic novel.'

on the lawyer—because he is the one who holds the reins of power.

By 1935, both the major film production companies in Shanghai, the Mingxing and Lianhua companies, had been thoroughly infiltrated by the left. The young radicals who moved into the studios had their ideological formation in the May 4th Movement of the 1920s—a movement founded on the massive student demonstrations of 4 May 1919 against the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, which proved (for the first time in China) the effectiveness of mass action. Many of the 'May 4th' students spent the 20s working in patriotic, left-wing theatre groups, and it was natural for them to gravitate towards the film industry as film became established as China's first mass medium. *Street Angel*, made for Mingxing in 1937, was one of many films associated with the May 4th Movement. Yuan Muzhi, its director, came to the movement later than many, for the simple reason that he was younger: he swung to the left and broke with his family in 1930, and made *Street Angel* (his last fiction feature) seven years later, at the age of 28.

There were strong patriotic reasons for the left to enter the film industry, apart from their obvious wish to leaven the studios' steady output of escapist fantasies with movies that would reflect something of the contemporary realities of life in China. For one thing, China was in fact at war with invading Japanese troops, and had been since 1931, although Chiang Kai-Shek's government did not formally recognise the fact until the end of 1937. For another, the film industry, founded by foreigners, was still hugely dominated by foreign interests: American and European film companies had substantial distribution and exhibition companies, and released many non-Chinese films.

Street Angel shrewdly adopts some of the 'safe' conventions of Hollywood—partly to meet the needs and established tastes of its audience halfway, and partly to circumvent the KMT's strict censorship, which outlawed all mention of the war and direct attacks on government policies. The film makes its political intentions as explicit as it needs by opening with a pan down one of the skyscrapers on Shanghai's Bund (establishing the action as taking place on the lowest rung of the city's society, but also

making a symbolic point about the story's relation to larger realities) and closing with the inverse shot, panning back up the same skyscraper. The main action takes place in a 'world apart', a studio world of precarious comedy and romance erected around the dreams and aspirations of those who live in it. When that world finally collapses, after the murder of the prostitute, it is because it cannot support the increasingly aggressive intrusions of the real world. The means of changing the situation are emphatically outside the control of the central characters.

Many aspects of *Street Angel* would bear a sustained analysis that we lack the space to undertake here: the committed concern for the position of women; the non-moralistic attitude to prostitution; the visual style, finally as close to Pabst as to Borzage; the strong ensemble playing, which testifies to the spirit of creative collaboration that informed the production. The two male leads, Zhao Dan and Wei Heling, became lasting 'stars' of the Chinese cinema; Zhou Xuan, who plays the younger girl, was a popular singer and actress in leftist films until mental illness curtailed her career. Director Yuan Muzhi abandoned fiction; his only subsequent film was the documentary *Yan'an and the Eighth Route Army* in 1939.

When Shanghai fell to the Japanese in the autumn of 1937, all the film industry progressives left the city. Many of them returned to the stage, touring with anti-Japanese theatre groups to raise funds and support for the resistance struggle. Under Japanese control, the remainder of the film industry produced more dedicatedly escapist movies than ever before. It was not until 1946 that Chinese filmmaking began to regain the impetus it lost in 1937.

1947 THE SPRING RIVER FLOWS EAST

The cinema of the late 40s was at least as embattled as the cinema of the previous decade. If anything, the Civil War that broke out between the Communist and KMT Nationalist armies made circumstances in KMT-controlled Shanghai harder than before—and the need for subversion was proportionally greater.

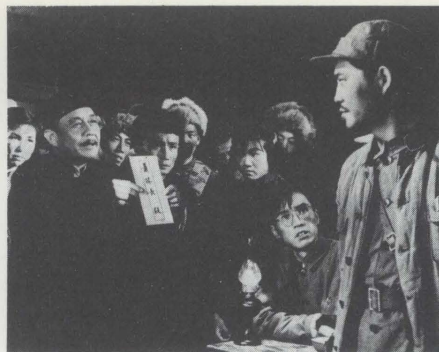
Shi Dongshan, one of the left-wing directors who returned to work in Shanghai after the war, expressed the disappointment of his generation at finding post-war society as corrupt and unjust as pre-war society: 'The eight years of war were hard for us, but we see reasons and justifications for the hardship. It is more difficult for us to understand why we feel defeated in the months after victory.' Shi Dongshan was one of a group of film-makers who reanimated the old Lianhua Film Company, and successfully fought off a KMT attempt to take it over. They went on to found their own company, Kunlun (registered in English as 'The Peak Film Industries Corporation'), which produced the most radical films of the period.

The Spring River Flows East was the second Kunlun film, and one of the most remarkable 'agitational' films ever made. Made in two parts, it spans the years from the first Japanese offensive in Manchuria in 1931 to the (unmentionable) Civil War that was raging while it was being made. It charts the political, spiritual and moral decline of an initially idealistic and patriotic schoolteacher. Soon after his wedding, he joins the Red Cross in order to take part in the anti-Japanese struggle. He is captured by the Japanese, but escapes to the KMT capital Chongqing, where he is rapidly seduced by bourgeois life. While his parents, wife and child endure severe hardships in occupied Shanghai, he bigamously remarries, to great material advantage. After the war, he is in Shanghai to extricate his company from its former Japanese connections when he meets his first wife. The social contradictions that have been building up since the start explode in hysterical confrontations. In the final shot, his mother screams (direct to camera) that suffering is as endless as a river of tears flowing to the sea.

The film's political method is essentially that of Jean Vigo's *A propos de Nice*: decadent luxury and abject poverty are systematically juxtaposed throughout. *Spring River*, however, takes the principle further than any film we have seen. The cross-cutting between the man's indulgences with his second wife and a mistress and his real family's terrifying struggle for survival is not only politically and emotionally provocative, but also the basis for a panoramic account of the larger contradictions in



1956: LI SHIZHEN, THE GREAT PHARMACOLOGIST
Zhao Dan (right) as 'the father of Chinese herbal medicine.'



1961: HURRICANE
Liu Jiyun (left) and Yu Yang (right): 'the communication gap between city-born cadres and a peasant population.'



1964-77: DR BETHUNE
Gerald Tannebaum as Dr Bethune, the Canadian surgeon who served with the Chinese Red Army.

Chinese society over a sixteen year period. Some of the film's ironies spring from direct parallels: the slippers of the husband and wife neatly arranged by the connubial bed, as against the tangle of shoes on the floor as the husband first betrays his wife. Elsewhere, there are broader contrasts: the glimpses of the real family's hardships are 'realist' in style (and often integrated with actual newsreel footage of the war), while the Chongqing scenes have the wit and stylistic contrivances of Lubitsch in an angry mood. The clash of idioms rhymes with the splintering of Chinese society, providing the film's means of understanding its protagonist's decline into social and sexual degeneracy; it is vital to the overall meaning that he emerge less a villain than a victim, however reprehensible his actions.

The film could not have been made or released if its producer Xia Yunhu had not regularly bribed the KMT authorities. Its immediate popularity embarrassed the censors, who compensated for their laxness by subjecting Kunlun's subsequent productions to particularly tight constraints. The company's films of 1948 were accordingly 'tamer'. It was not until it produced *Crows and Sparrows* in 1949 that Kunlun dared openly to attack the KMT again; the authorities halted production, and the film was completed only after the Liberation of Shanghai. Both *Spring River* and *Crows and Sparrows* were directed by Zheng Junli (he shares credit on the earlier film with the older director Cai Chusheng, who apparently worked chiefly on the script), but it would be misleading to co-opt the films into an auteurist reading. Like the left-wing films of the 30s, these were fundamentally collaborative efforts, and their strengths clearly derive from the solidarity of the teamwork that went into their production.

1952 DRAGON BEARD DITCH

The film industry was taken under national control soon after Liberation, and new, state-run studios began producing films that celebrated social reforms and tried to heal the wounds of the Civil War. Five of the most progressive pre-Liberation companies (including

Kunlun) were allowed to continue functioning independently, but proved less interested in serving the immediate needs of the state; they were assimilated into the national industry in 1952-53, after several of their films had been found 'ideologically dubious'.

Dragon Beard Ditch was made at Beijing Film Studio, one of the new bases of the nationalised industry, and it epitomises both the strengths and limitations of the films of the period. Like many of the films made in the People's Republic, it was based on existing source material—here, a play by Lao She, performed by the Beijing People's Art Theatre in 1951. (Literary and drama sources were used in preference to original screenplays increasingly frequently—partly to save time, and partly because ideological questions would already have been thrashed out around the source work.) The play told an archetypal 'before-and-after-Liberation' story, about the refurbishment of one of Beijing's poorest suburbs. The ditch of the title is an open sewer that runs through a densely populated district. It adds to the miseries afflicting the inhabitants of a small courtyard, who are already weighed down by KMT taxes and harassed by a local gang-boss. After Liberation, the ditch is paved over, the gang-boss is arrested, and the people find new direction in their lives.

The simple, didactic point is, however, massively over-produced by the film's visual imagery. The pre-Liberation scenes use graphic expressionist images to evoke the suffering and squalor. The second half replaces the pervasive gloom with sunny skies and radiant optimism; the effect is no less expressionistic, but the contrast is so extreme that the closing scenes appear naive and glib. This seriously undermines the conviction of the ensemble acting, which does full justice to Lao She's mastery of Beijing slang and manners throughout. Chinese film-makers had to learn, like their western counterparts, that it is easier to represent 'evil' than 'good'.

The film, then, is one of the clearest instances of a problematic that becomes central to Chinese cinema of the period: what is an adequate representation of Liberation? Some films sidestepped the question by focusing on the struggles of the past, but most of the early 50s films that attempted to deal with the present shared *Dragon Beard Ditch's* tendency

towards hyperbole to some degree. And it was this kind of solution that paved the way for the 'revolutionary romanticism' of the Cultural Revolution.

1956 LI SHIZHEN, THE GREAT PHARMACOLOGIST

It was not until the formulation of the 'Hundred Flowers' campaign in 1956-57 that new avenues opened up for China's film-makers, as for artists in other fields. The campaign aimed to attract more of China's intellectuals into the Communist party, and it encouraged the free expression of ideas whether or not they directly 'served the masses'. (Some of the artists who responded soon regretted their haste, since they were purged in the anti-rightist campaign that followed in the summer of 1957.) The campaign had the undoubtedly beneficial effect of giving interesting projects to many of the veterans of the pre-Liberation left-wing cinema. Chen Xihe and Ye Ming, who worked at the progressive Wenhua Film Company in the late 40s, joined forces to make an exceptionally mature and stylish adaptation of Ba Jin's dynastic novel *Family*. Sun Yu, one of the pioneers of May 4th Movement cinema, returned from the political wilderness to make the witty historical reverie *Folk Tales of Lu Ban*. And his near-contemporary Shen Fu, who began directing in the late 30s and was one of the team of writers on *Crows and Sparrows*, left his administrative duties to direct *Li Shizhen, the Great Pharmacologist*.

Shen's film is an elegant and moving biography of the Ming Dynasty scholar who is remembered as the father of Chinese herbal medicine. Apart from providing the actor Zhao Dan (star of *Street Angel* and *Crows and Sparrows*) with his richest and most understated role of the decade, it brought to the Chinese cinema something of the heightened simplicity and visual sophistication of Mizoguchi's late films, made around the same time in Japan. The film covers some thirty-five years of Li's life, from his failure in the Imperial examinations in 1540 and consequent decision to pursue the despised discipline of medicine to his extended research trips for his monumental revision of the Chinese *Materia Medica*.

Li is represented as an 'exemplary' intellectual: his endeavours are opposed by the Imperial establishment (whose members subscribe to the belief that aristocratic innards are made of gold), and he goes to the peasants to learn their traditional herbal remedies. At the same time, the film constructs him as an individual in a way that would have been unthinkable in any film of the preceding five years. This is not a matter of his scientific skills or his professional resolve, but of his place in a traditionally conceived historical continuum: the reactionary nobles and priests who oppose him are offset by a number of benign father-figures (his real father; a sympathetic lecturer at the Imperial Medical Academy; an elderly herbalist), and Li grooms a young peasant pupil to take over his work when he dies. Shen's achievement is plausible both artistically and politically.

1961 HURRICANE

Politics blew the Chinese cinema every which way in the wake of the anti-rightist purges of 1957. The Great Leap Forward campaign of 1958 reduced budgets and production schedules, while demanding films to encourage overnight increases in industrial productivity. The tenth anniversary of Liberation, in 1959, had to be marked with a number of celebratory epics. And the lean years of 1960 and 1961 saw a power struggle in the upper echelons of the Communist Party, which resulted in confused and contradictory directives filtering down to cultural workers. In an essay written last year (and translated in the Dossier published by the BFI to accompany this Retrospective), the former Minister of Culture and film scriptwriter Xia Yan recalled that a number of films on the theme of land reform were mooted at the time, but that they never got beyond idea stage because of constant disagreements on their political line. Apparently the only one that reached fruition was Xie Tieli's *Hurricane*.

Land reform was a key factor in the Chinese Communist party's rise to power; it was the basis of the party's appeal to China's vast peasant population. It was therefore a potent topic to revive in the popular mind at a time of political and economic crisis. *Hurricane* was based on Zhou Libo's novel of the same name, published in 1948, a partisan but unusually realistic description of the problems involved in implementing the party's land reform policies. The book (and, to a surprising extent, its film adaptation) inhabits the same world as the celebrated Chinese peasant dictum of the 1930s, which read 'The Japanese kill too much, the KMT tax too much, and the Communists meet too much.'

Both novel and film are set in a village in North China, in one of the first areas won by the Communist PLA (People's Liberation Army) in the Civil War of the late 40s. A PLA work-team arrives and sets about instructing the local tenant farmers and agricultural labourers how to claim what is rightfully theirs. There

is an immediately obvious gap between the work-team's Marxist rhetoric and the peasants' responses, and it takes several weeks of misunderstandings, discussions and near catastrophes before the peasants understand that they should bring the local land-owner to trial for his past injustices and cruelties.

In its wry observation of the communication gap between the city-born cadres and a peasant population with centuries of tradition behind it, the film recognises all the practical difficulties of revolution; it could be read either as an inspiring reminder of the difficult struggles of the period before and after Liberation, or as a gesture of apology for the failure of the Great Leap Forward. But although the film is probably the most rounded and faithful account of the revolutionary process yet produced by the Chinese cinema, it none the less contains the seed of its own opposite—the clear-cut, simplistic 'model revolutionary works' of the Cultural Revolution. The PLA team leader played by Yu Yang (the ultimate refinement of a role that he had been playing with minor variations ever since *Daughters of China*, the first film made wholly after Liberation) is drawn with too much human warmth for him to be mistaken for one of the flawless heroes of the Cultural Revolution, but the character is still presented as a prototypical 'bearer of revolutionary truth' and his moments of apparent fallibility are all shams.

Another film made in the same year offers a clearer indication of the impending swing to 'ultra-leftist' purity. *Red Guards of Lake Hong* is a modern (meaning newly written) revolutionary opera, adapted from a stage original, which heralds the Cultural Revolution's Manichean version of revolutionary struggle, not to mention its emphasis on heroic Communist martyrdom. The film has a vigour and convincing enthusiasm lacking from its Cultural Revolution successors, and is anyway of interest as part of a larger attempt to create a form that is culturally specific to China, but it is none the less a clear harbinger of things to come.

The last important film made before the Cultural Revolution halted all production for four years was Shui Hua's *Red Crag*, in retrospect a fascinating mixture of prophecy and valediction. Zhao Dan plays a revolutionary martyr who is led to his death in front of a KMT firing squad just as the PLA approaches. He brings an extraordinary gravity and dignity to the part; it is as if three decades of left-wing cinema are dying with the character. Prior to his execution, the character has spent almost the entire film in solitary confinement in a dirty prison cell—circumstances that foreshadow Zhao Dan's actual fate in the Cultural Revolution with grim accuracy.

1964-77 DR BETHUNE

A few films of the mid-60s reacted against the prevailing drift towards ultra-leftist purity. Xie Tieli's *Early Spring*, Xie Jin's *Two Stage Sisters* and Li Jun's

Serfs (the latter set in Tibet and acted exclusively by Tibetans) are all distinguished by ambitious *mise en scène* and an almost palpable spirit of innovation. Only one film, however, can be considered as standing in opposition to the dominant political culture: Zhang Junxiang's *Dr Bethune*, a tribute to the Canadian chest surgeon who gave his life while serving as a volunteer with the Red Army in 1939. The film began production in 1964; its cinematographer was Wu Yinxian, who, as a documentary cameraman in the war, had filmed the real Bethune shortly before his death. During post-production, the film was halted on the personal orders of Jiang Qing (her argument was that Wu's existing documentary footage provided sufficient memorial to the foreigner's courage); and it was apparently not brought to completion until 1977.

As the only Chinese film with a Western protagonist, *Dr Bethune* can only be read as a plea for internationalism. Nothing else about the film could be interpreted as 'radical': its position is more humanitarian than Maoist, it could frequently be accused of socialist sentimentality, and its script never ventures beyond simple description of Bethune's life and work in China. On the other hand, its very restraint and simplicity constitute an implicit attack on the stridency and aggressive xenophobia of most other films of the mid-60s. In this light, its polemic force remains unmistakable.

... AND SINCE THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

The film industry produced a number of 'model revolutionary works' between 1970 and 1976, almost all of them notable for their bombastic imagery and monotonous rhetoric. The industry began the struggle to return to its former stature only after the overthrow of the 'Gang of Four' in 1977. Progress so far has been painfully slow. Few of the films made up to 1979 proved popular with the Chinese public; there were even instances of angry patrons sending their ticket stubs to leaders of the film industry and demanding partial refunds, saying that the film they saw was not worth the full ticket price.

The Cultural Revolution did untold damage to the film industry, not only by murdering or incapacitating many of its key personnel, but also by withdrawing virtually the entire film heritage from sight. Current releases like Zhan Xiangchi and Han Xiaolei's *Sakura* and Zhang Zheng's *Xiaohua* are amongst the first films to break away from Cultural Revolution models, but they are too obviously imitative of overseas films (especially Taiwanese melodramas, regrettably) to be hopeful signs in themselves. The best hope for the future is that a new generation should be given the chance to see and analyse the achievements of the past. This is currently happening. The heritage is certainly more than strong enough to build on.



A WOMAN OF PARIS

DAVID
ROBINSON

Charles Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris* was one of the most influential films of the silent era, occupying a place somewhat equivalent to *Citizen Kane* in the period of talking films. Yet paradoxically it remains the least known of the handful of undisputed classics. For more than half a century its maker declined to reissue it, so that the mould of myth began to gather. Only a year or so before his death in 1977 was he persuaded to relent. The still pristine negative was brought out and Chaplin, as the final work of his creative life, composed a new synchronised score.

At the time he made the film, Chaplin was working with intense concentration. He completed work on *The Pilgrim* on 25 September 1922; but the studio records date the commencement of *A Woman of Paris* on 15 August 1922. Since shooting did not begin until the end of November, this date may indicate the start of Chaplin's work on the story.

In his autobiography he explains that he had wanted to make a film to launch Edna Purviance, his faithful leading lady through nine years and three dozen films, as a dramatic actress. 'Although Edna and I were emotionally estranged, I was still interested in her career. But looking objectively at Edna, I realised she was growing rather matronly, which would not be suitable for the feminine confection necessary for my future pictures.' As suitable roles, Chaplin first considered *The Trojan Women* and then *Josephine*. Although the Empress did not provide the role he was seeking for Purviance, it gave him an idea for a film for himself; and for years he toyed with a Napoleon project. Then he was introduced to Peggy Hopkins Joyce (Theodore Huff says the introduction was made in the 'late summer' of 1922, by the director Marshall Neilan). Peggy Hopkins Joyce was a figure of romantic notoriety in the 20s. The daughter of a barber, she became a Ziegfeld girl and went on to marry five millionaires. Chaplin describes his relationship with Peggy as 'bizarre, though brief'. Her reminiscences, particularly some of her anecdotes about an

association with 'a well-known French publisher', gave him the idea for *A Woman of Paris*.

Between August and November Chaplin worked on the scenario. His original notes—which Lady Chaplin has generously allowed me to examine—show the story progressing through many stages of development, several alternative endings, and the elimination of superfluous scenes, until it finally arrives at the refined, spare, elliptical structure of the eventual film. The press of the time were deeply impressed by Chaplin's statement that the film was shot without a script. As in the case of D. W. Griffith, this is somewhat misleading. The story notes show that there was nothing in any way improvisational about the making of the film. Evidently by the time Chaplin came to shoot, the form and detail were so precisely worked out in his mind that a conventional shooting script would have been merely a superfluous and even distracting formality. A shooting record (which is also preserved by Lady Chaplin) indicates how definitive was his conception, once shooting was begun. Only two of the scenes shot were not used; while a couple of other scenes were filmed in slightly variant forms. The long circulated legend that an alternative tragic ending was shot for distribution in continental Europe seems unfounded.

A Woman of Paris was shot in almost complete sequence continuity. The first take of the opening shot of the film was made on the afternoon of 22 November 1922; the final scene of the film was shot on the afternoon of 25 June 1923. Some unimportant insert and supplementary material was filmed subsequently during one day and two nights' shooting. Occasionally the filming would be interrupted for a few days or a week, presumably allowing for the replacement of sets in the Chaplin studios where all interiors were shot, and perhaps for any necessary story revision.

Picture: Marie, now the Woman of Paris, meets her old love again under the uneasy eyes of his widowed mother.

The film opens in a little French village. Marie St Clair and Jean Millet are lovers, but Marie's stern father has locked her in so that they may not meet. Jean helps her to escape through the window, but on her return she finds that she is now locked out. Jean takes her to his own home, where in turn his father forbids Marie the house. They decide to leave for Paris together; but when Jean returns home to collect his belongings, leaving Marie waiting at the railway station, he finds his father dead. Marie telephones, misunderstands his uncompleted explanation, and leaves the village alone...

A year later, Paris has transformed her. She is now the elegant and brilliant mistress of Pierre Revel, a rich man about town. Marie's wistful ambitions of marriage, children and respectability are dashed by the news that Pierre is to enter upon a marriage of commercial convenience. At this juncture she chances to meet Jean, who since his father's death has arrived in Paris to work as a painter. Marie commissions him to paint her portrait. As their mutual fondness grows once more, she becomes more disillusioned with life with Pierre.

Jean proposes marriage. Marie accepts, but then overhears him telling his resentful, anxious mother that he does not mean to go through with it, and proposed only in a moment of weakness. The unhappy Marie returns to Pierre and refuses to see Jean, now remorseful and desperate. Jean forces a confrontation with Pierre and Marie in an elegant restaurant. There is a scene; and the humiliated Jean goes out and shoots himself. His body is taken to his studio; and his frantic mother takes up his gun to avenge herself on Marie. Failing to find her, she returns home and is softened on seeing the broken-hearted Marie weeping beside the body of Jean.

Chaplin considered many alternative endings before settling on the present one, which shows Marie and the mother reconciled and dedicating their lives to orphaned children in the country. In the last scene Marie is riding on the tail-board of a farm cart with a little boy. At

that moment Pierre's car races by in the opposite direction. Neither is aware of the other. 'By the way,' asks Pierre's secretary, 'whatever happened to Marie St Clair?' Pierre shrugs.

Chaplin called the film 'A Drama of Fate'—the first title for the film was in fact *Destiny*; in later stages of the work it was called *Public Opinion* and *The Immortal Woman*—and the plot constantly depends upon chance: the father's inopportune death; the accidental meeting of Marie and Jean; the overheard conversation. The plot however—which would have served any of the stage melodramas of Chaplin's London youth—is of much less significance than the characters he portrayed and the style he invented to portray them.

When the film was prepared for re-issue, Chaplin took the opportunity for some imperceptible re-editing. At the same time he seems to have eliminated the original foreword, which he may have considered too dated. It ran 'Humanity is composed not of heroes and villains, but of men and women, and all their passions, both good and bad, have been given them by God. They sin only in blindness and the ignorant condemn their mistakes, but the wise pity them.' For the audience of 1923, as the press notices reveal, it was startling to have a film which showed a courtesan as sympathetic, a playboy as charming, intelligent, tolerant and generous, a mother who was jealous and vindictive, a hero who was weak and mother-smothered.

Today it is only by going back to the original reviews that we can gather a true idea of how startlingly realistic the characters and the performances in fact seemed to the audiences of 1923. It is remarkable—particularly if we make comparisons with even the most sophisticated acting of other films of the period—that the playing of Edna Purviance and Adolphe Menjou, even without allowance for the fact that the film is silent, still appears undated and valid.

Chaplin could not rely on such responsive and supple collaborators in the secondary roles, for which he had to depend on often over-experienced professionals. He appears to have been particularly dissatisfied with the actress in the small but demanding role of Jean's mother. Lydia Knott—then only fifty years old, and the mother of W. S. Hart's best director Lambert Hillyer—was a serviceable dramatic actress, but irretrievably committed to older conventions. Chaplin however succeeds to marvellous effect in restraining her theatrical tendencies, in the scene where she receives the news of her son's suicide. Remaining quite still and expressionless throughout the questioning by the policemen, her performance rises to much greater emotional effect than in her more heavily dramatised moments. Even actors were impressed by Chaplin's achievement. The correspondent of the *Los Angeles Times* reported: 'One of the screen's greatest stars, who for obvious reasons must not be named here, said to me, "Chaplin's picture is the greatest ever made. He shows 'em all up, and now Griffith and Lubitsch can join hands and



Above: Marie's massage—one of the legendary scenes of the film. From this shot the camera cuts to close-up of the masseuse, whose Chaplinesque raised eyebrows and pursed mouth provide a dual commentary—on the gossip of Marie and her girl friend Fifi, and on the progress of her hands upon Marie's body. The masseuse, Nelly Bly Baker, was not a professional actress but the Chaplin studio secretary.

Left: Marie faints in Pierre's arms as the other diners obscure the scene of Jean's suicide in the restaurant.

jump into the ocean without being missed.'"

Chaplin's innovations went much further than the performances. He extended the particular allusive quality of his gag comedy and his vaudeville-taught precision of *mise en scène* to dramatic purposes. Individual scenes have of course become part of film legend—the lights of the unseen train that flash across Marie's face as she stands on the station platform (achieving production economy and potent emotional suggestion all in one); the censor-proof indication of Pierre and Marie's relationship merely by the proprietorial way that Menjou takes a handkerchief from a drawer in Marie's boudoir.

Another celebrated scene well illustrates how through such pieces of business Chaplin illuminates the progress of relationships in the most economical, precise and vivid way. After Marie has commissioned the portrait, Jean comes to her apartment to help her select a suitable gown. Remembering the simple girl who left the village, he looks on with growing unease as she produces a succession of glamorous costumes. She asks a maid to get an accessory—a scarf—from

a drawer. As the maid pulls out the scarf, a man's wing collar falls from the drawer. Jean sees it. Marie notices neither the collar nor Jean's recognition of the manner of her life and the source of her fine wardrobe. Even without the lightning flash revelation that such scenes provided for the audience of 1923, this method of storytelling still retains, for present-day spectators, its brilliance, its fascination, its *suspense*.

Chaplin's contemporaries credited him with definitively introducing to the screen the comedy of manners. In the half century during which the film receded into legend, this aspect of its influence has sometimes been contested. DeMille can be pointed out as a predecessor, and Lubitsch as a nearly exact contemporary both working in similar fields. But DeMille, though his subjects were the manners and morals of the time—or at least his own highly coloured perceptions of them—made few innovations in narrative style. Admirable as they are, films like *Why Change Your Wife?* and *The Affairs of Anatol* depend on plot and title rather than on subtle interpretations of character through behaviour.

'Any fifteen-year-old child who appreciates it,' wrote a contemporary reviewer, 'should be taken home and spanked.' Chaplin managed to suggest eroticism in the scene of the studio party without giving the censor a cuttable frame. The lady stands on a revolving pedestal: as the man begins to turn, winding the draperies off her person and around his own waist, the camera moves from her to him. The tail end of the drape comes into frame: all that is seen are brief shots of bare feet, and (right) a bare shoulder.



Lubitsch's method is much closer to Chaplin's and was, certainly, anticipated in his German works, like *Die Flamme*. But *The Marriage Circle*, which first revealed 'the Lubitsch touch' to the United States, was released only six months after *A Woman of Paris*; and was almost certainly begun after Lubitsch had seen Chaplin's film. Herman G. Weinberg, who is not lacking in loyalty to either artist, states: 'After completing *Rosita*, Lubitsch saw Chaplin's epochal *A Woman of Paris*, which was to change the whole course of screen direction in one area—the comedy of manners, which, up to that time, had been the special preserve of Cecil B. DeMille ... He [Lubitsch] was absolutely *bouleversé* by the Chaplin film.'

A Woman of Paris had a more direct progeny, also. Edward Sutherland, who was assistant director, worked in an allusive style noticeably influenced by Chaplin's film when he made his own début as a director in 1925. Monta Bell, credited as editorial supervisor, developed a directly comparable style of observational comedy in his films, starting with *The Snob* (1924) and *The King on Main Street*. The two French research

assistants also became directors in their own right. Jean de Limur went on to be assistant to Rex Ingram before directing Jeanne Eagels in two films of 1929, *The Lake* and *Jealousy*. The debt of Henri d'Abbadie d'Arraste's *Service for Ladies* and *A Gentleman of Paris* (both 1927) was emphasised by the presence of Adolphe Menjou, whose already established career was given definitive shape by his man-about-town role in *A Woman of Paris*. It is impossible precisely to assess what must have been its influence upon such a director as Malcolm St Clair, but the debt of *The Grand Duchess and the Waiter* is very evident. We have Michael Powell's own testimony that his determination to work in the cinema was settled on the day he played hookey from his mundane office job to see *A Woman of Paris*. 'I reckoned that if the film was capable of this sort of subtlety, it was the medium for me.'

Few films in history have been more confidently and rapturously heralded as masterpieces on their first appearance. The press acclamation was the same all over the world. The irony and the trouble was that when the public at large were told that their beloved comic idol,

Charlie, had made *Great Art*, that the film was tragic, and that he wasn't even in it (apart from a brief walk-on as a porter, heavily disguised) they stayed away. Chaplin must have been shocked and understandably disappointed when for the first time one of his pictures lost money; and, as producer, unconsoled by the awareness that the film was in many respects before its time.

More than fifty years afterwards, when he was finally persuaded to let audiences see the film again, he seems to have feared that it would now come *after* its time, that audiences of the 1970s would no longer be sympathetic to the characters, the performances and the sentiments (hence presumably the omission of the original foreword). Any such fears were needless, as the New York notices—if anything more adulatory than those of the critics of 1923—alone were to prove. After fifty-seven years, the narrative skill, the belief, the reality of the performances and the intensity of the octogenarian artist's new musical *leitmotifs* (rooted in nineteenth century theatre music of the *Enfant Prodiges* school) were shown still to command their audience. ■



MARTIN POLON

THE FUTURE OF HOME AND THE FOUR HORSE

What is the future of home video? Within this decade it seems likely that video, in one form or another, will be as much a part of the furniture as the television set is now. Sales of video-cassette recorders in Britain now stand at some 200,000 and are rising fast. Video-discs are waiting to be launched on the mass market. Teletext systems and video games are being extensively advertised, not least on television itself. Traditional television is about to be challenged by a cumulative assault of alternative programming (from shows to computer football), video and computer information services.

In this article, a slightly edited version of a paper given to a film and television seminar at Aspen, Colorado earlier this year, Martin Polon looks at some of the alternatives, and at some of the problems. The paper was written in an American context, but its implications are international.



SUPERMARKET—HOME SALES

ENTERTAINMENT MEN OF TECHNOLOGY

The last twenty years of the twentieth century could well be remembered as the most dynamic in terms of transition within the home, as the home becomes an electronic entertainment centre for recreational and educational living. This transition will not be without its distress; which is the usual condition in human history. Its speed and dimension will depend on the interaction of a number of elements which are not part of the technology of home entertainment. These elements are best identified as modifiers: as the four horsemen of technology. They are the areas of standards versus free enterprise; international and domestic regulation; the relation between hardware and the demand for software; and

protection from copyright abuse and piracy.

The question that arises is whether these are apocryphal stalking horses or really apocalyptic steeds of the future. Life-styles and perceptions of human values have been altered by previous innovations in home entertainment. The effect of radio during the 30s and 40s can be measured by the mass hysteria created by Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* broadcast. During the adolescence of black and white television, the impact of the *I Love Lucy* show was so great that its Monday night spot produced a marked lessening in the use of the telephone and in water demand throughout the United States. The Marshall Field

department store in Chicago changed its evening shopping night from Monday to Thursday with a sign proclaiming, 'We love Lucy, too, so we're closing on Monday nights.' The whole impact of the 1950s television experience was felt as a thunderclap from Zeus by the motion picture industry, which was nearly bankrupted by the change in viewing habits.

Each wave of home entertainment technology during this century has affected some form of out-of-home entertainment. Whether it was the phonograph record or radio or films that caused the decline of vaudeville, and the later painful disruption of the theatrical film by television, all became part of a transition. The net result was to move

programming, or software, into an emerging format. So it was that vaudeville supplied radio and motion pictures, that live artists and bands supplied records, and that the film industry eventually supplied television. It would appear that again the trend will be for theatrical films and television to supply the software for the rapidly emerging home video market-place. It only remains to see how the impact of external forces will modify or restrict the transfer of programming from one medium to another. In any event, the future of the feature film form will greatly depend on the technological restructuring of home entertainment.

STANDARDS

The use of a standard in the manufacture and sale of home entertainment equipment provides a unity to the various elements of buying, vending and repairing a particular class of consumer electronics. The success of voluntary standards can be measured in the universal usage of the audio cassette, for recording and reproducing sound. The term voluntary is used because the cassette standards decision was not produced by government regulation. The perceived government need for regulated standards produced the 525-line television scanning rate used in the United States (and elsewhere), and known as NTSC (National Television Standards Committee). This standard seems less adequate as the demand has increased for higher scan rates and resolution.

The other side of the standards experience can be seen in the development of the four channel or quadraphonic system for home sound reproduction. The lack of a single standard was the logical result of a free enterprise situation in which a number of manufacturers tried to establish dominance or at least partial control of the quadraphonic audio market. The marketing conflict during most of the 1970s ended with the almost total failure of the four-channel format to establish a permanent position in the home. Millions of dollars worth of four-channel audio hardware and software (discs) was produced and purchased. The end of the experience found equipment and records being sold at below cost, while hundreds of thousands of consumers worldwide were left with equipment that could not provide the experience for which it was designed.

This recent venture has had its effect on consumer confidence, as the entertainment hardware and software industries venture into the 1980s offering visions of visual 'plums' hanging from electronic 'trees'. The presence of a number of alternative visual systems to perform the same function will be a difficult pattern to justify in the market-place, unless the alternatives do a different job, or do the same job in a different way at a lower price. The same rule of thumb applies to the cost factoring of manufacturing video equipment for the home. The larger the quantity produced, the more options can be exercised in providing for lower price

with improved performance. This has been proved with such items as electronic watches, calculators, home computers. The Electronic Industries Association of America points out that consumer electronics equipment had only moved up the US Department of Labor Consumer Price Index to 102.4 by the end of 1978, compared to 202.9 for all consumable items on the index (with 100 in 1967 as a base).

This double-edged sword of the future, labelled standards on one side and free enterprise on the other, is a very difficult one to handle. It cannot be ignored because of the intense competition for the in-home entertainment market. There are no guarantees for the future except that the viewing public will have more entertainment than ever before. This entertainment does not have to enter the home via video-tape or video-disc; it could as well enter on cable, or subscription TV, via satellite, or even through fibre optic linkages from the telephone company. The final decision is in the hands of the consumer, and is a balance between price, convenience and confidence.

In the creation of a direct purchase market for visual entertainment in the home, there are two competitive formats for the recording and reproduction of programmes. These two systems are video-tape and video-disc. There is some need for standardisation, because the concept of maintaining several video systems with different kinds of blanks and pre-recorded software simply will not work within the framework of the average home. There could well be the kind of symbiotic relationship found in audio, with a video-disc player for playback and a video recorder to create original and duplicate recordings.

The two tape formats used in the home for video recording and playback are not compatible; there is no possibility of exchange of material between the two systems. As we enter the 80s, there has been a marketing co-existence between the two video-cassette recording (VCR) systems, with the public buying one or the other and establishing an instant personal standard. These two remaining VCR formats represent a reduction from the original half-dozen alternatives for home video recording. Whether there can remain two systems in the face of competition from video-disc is unclear, both in terms of available software and of market-place domination.

To illustrate the dilemma facing the consumer, the diversity of equipment currently available or envisaged should be looked at. In VCR recording with video-tape, the two systems are BETA and VHS. The Beta system, introduced by the Sony Corporation, uses a cassette in which the tape is wrapped round the recording head with an omega wrap (so called because the tape resembles the Greek letter Omega as it is wrapped round the video head drum). Machines using this format are manufactured by or for Sanyo, Sony, Toshiba, Zenith. The

competing tape system is known as Video Home System (VHS). Originated by the Victor Company of Japan (JVC), the VHS system is being made by or for Akai, Curtis Mathes, General Electric, Hitachi, JVC, Magnavox, Mitsubishi, Panasonic, Philco, Quasar, RCA, Sharp, and Sylvania. The VHS system uses an 'M' wrap cassette to record and playback. All the manufacturers mentioned for both systems are marketing to the United States, but many of them are selling the same products around the world.

The diversity among video-disc systems is even greater than for video-cassette recorders. There are three major alignments for the discs. The first unit on the market was the optical tracking, laser out-of-groove 'Magnavision'. This technically elegant video player, incorporating variable speed control capability for fast, normal or slow viewing speeds plus frame by frame search, was developed by N. V. Phillips and MCA. The no physical contact design is the basis for a co-operative venture (DiscoVision) involving MCA and IBM, and a Phillips licensing arrangement involving Sony Corporation. Other licensing arrangements have been made between N. V. Phillips and Trio-Kenwood, and the Sharp Corporation. Magnavision players are being manufactured in Tennessee by Magnavox for the USA, while Phillips produces hardware for the European market. Pioneer in Japan is building enhanced players for the world market, in yet another co-operative venture (Universal-Pioneer). The Universal Pictures arm of MCA is the keystone of the software package for the laser disc system. Stereophonic playback to accompany the visual software is possible with Phillips-MCA system.

RCA has announced the second major video-disc system, known as SelectaVision. The RCA unit will have a lower retail price for both the player and the discs, but with fewer features and some limitations on sound playback in stereo, at least for the present. The RCA system uses the disc's grooves to guide the video pickup, in what is known as a capacitive system. The fact that there is actual contact means that some wear will take place. CBS Inc. has been licensed by RCA for worldwide manufacturing and distribution. Software will be provided for SelectaVision by United Artists, MGM, Paramount, Fox, Disney and others. Mitsubishi and Hitachi have licensed with RCA for manufacturing rights.

The third disc system, and the most recently announced (1980), is the joint venture of Matsushita Electric and its JVC subsidiary. Matsushita, which also owns and operates the Panasonic, National and Techniques manufacturing identities as well as owning Quasar in the US, has adopted the Video High Density (VHD) disc system. The audio and video information is recorded in a grooveless disc as a continuing series of pits on a disc surface. A capacitive pickup electronically tracks along the pits, producing signals for playback.

It becomes apparent that, in the long

run, the ability to compete in the home entertainment arena will depend upon some level of organisation existing among the video playback devices. The shake-down period for video-discs will take place in the US as far as the Japanese are concerned, according to Electronic Industries Association of Japan (EIAJ) informed sources. A future scenario could support two kinds of discs, with one having more features at a higher price. The disc would exist in parallel with VCR video-tape recorders, each serving a different function. That this remains speculation, even though the video playback market will pick up rapidly during the early 80s, becomes the testimonial for the resolution of a standardisation of the market-place, if not of the product.

Standards operate quite differently in the area of home computing and the interconnection of computers with other elements of the home entertainment centre. The major forces behind the so-called home computer (usually an 8-bit central processor with 8 to 16 thousand units of memory, as opposed to large computers with a 32-bit central processor and up to 16 million units of memory) are companies which have a vested interest in the whole computer spectrum. So the same standards that Hewlett Packard or Texas Instruments would use for large computer interconnection will guide home computer design. Even if computer systems have different design philosophies (architecture), adaptation is done with additional electronic circuits. Similarly, the standards for the electronic interface between the computer and the home audio-video equipment could follow established electronics industry guidelines.

REGULATION

The forces of regulation can often shape the use and limitations of a portion of the technology spectrum, especially if an actual radio frequency wavelength is involved. These forces have a very tightly defined role. Too much regulation and the use of technology is stifled. But not enough control can allow a dominant market force to exercise unnecessary influence. Since radio frequencies are shared, some control has to be applied.

The role of the domestic communications satellite has become so bound up with the provisions of mass television programming that future development of the satellite capability in the US is inherent in the growth plans for cable television, on-air subscription television, public television, and so on. Conversely, if the use of new satellites were to be restricted, then the whole direction of future television programme distribution would be changed. The impact of satellites so encompasses home entertainment that future ancillary rights to theatrical features will have to consider the effect of satellite distribution. One playback via satellite in 1985 could expose a feature to more than 50 million homes.

There is also the question of international regulation, which was one of

many issues raised during the World Administrative Radio Conference held in Geneva at the end of 1979. The question of satellite position and potential interference with national boundaries became as important as making new frequencies available for future satellite use. In both categories, the industrialised nations face real resistance to large-scale satellite expansion, especially of large spectrum transmission by satellites in new orbits on new frequencies. Countries not currently using satellites want to reserve space for future use, and are highly sensitive to direct broadcast intrusion across geographical boundaries by existing satellites belonging to the 'high technology' club of nations.

Domestic regulation in the United States has become very complicated as the Federal Communications Commission attempts to deregulate much of the domestic satellite communications industry. Previous regulations had set up a pattern of competition which tended to bunch certain kinds of service to specific carriers; i.e., Western Union's Westar satellite service carrying network television programming, RCA Americom's Satcom system having the bulk of all cable television operators, and Comsat with government services. Western Union and RCA are the domestic carriers at present serving the video entertainment industry. The satellites used for such service are placed in a geostationary or synchronous orbit, which makes the satellite virtually a stable reflector for programming sent up from one point and relayed down to other points. The design of each satellite incorporates a number of transponders, which receive the incoming signal from the earth (uplink) and retransmit back down to earth (downlink). The total number of transponders defines the total capacity of the 'bird', as satellites are known. The space of a transponder channel varies with the signal; bank financial data transmitted from one point to another takes far less space than a video signal with audio, which generally uses the whole transponder channel.

Western Union's two 12-transponder channel satellites were built by Hughes and launched in 1974. The satellites, in 91° and 99° orbits, are integrated with the entire Western Union 9,000 mile ground-based microwave system, and sending earth stations located in New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Dallas, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle. RCA Americom is using two of its own 24-channel satellites in orbit at 135° and 119°, launched early in 1976. RCA maintains elaborate send and receive earth stations in or near New York, Atlanta, Houston, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Receive-only satellite earth stations, capable of being directed to one or more of the satellite orbits located between 97° and 135°, are more than 3,500 in number. This includes cable and subscription television, network television, public television, and independent television stations.

The formation of new networks has

been one of the most significant changes that satellites have brought to the distribution of visual major entertainment. The satellite super stations have developed a large audience for independent television stations such as Atlanta's WTCC, owned by Ted Turner (who intends to repeat the success with an all-news satellite feed for cable TV, Cable News Network). Other independent stations, such as WGN (Chicago), KTVU (Oakland), WOR (New York) and KTLA (Los Angeles), have become super stations.

Satellite sports networks have developed, such as the ESPN operation, and the Madison Square Garden Sports circuit, operated by US-Columbia Cablevision. Minority programming has developed from the Black Entertainment Network and the Spanish language Galavision, and religious broadcasting from the Christian Broadcasting Network, the Trinity Network and the PTL Club. Special services such as the all-children's programming Nickelodeon service from Warner-Amex, and the Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network (C-SPAN) with congressional broadcasts, are recent satellite services dedicated to cable operators. Current and future services from Time-Life bring the Home Box Office (HBO) movie programme to cable operators, and in 1980 42 hours per week of British Broadcasting Corporation service. The diversity and dimension of satellite has just begun to be realised, but will need a very special regulatory climate to allow the growth to continue.

Government regulation takes other forms in terms of satellites. The availability of a space shuttle, on schedule, is of vital importance to operators of satellites such as Hughes, RCA and ATT, who are planning successive launches early in the 80s. The current NASA schedule slippages have the effect of regulation because additional and upgraded capacity is kept out of space. In another sense, the need for alternative launch capacity puts the European Space Agency's Ariane rocket on line, but the question of established priorities will not change in terms of European satellite launches. Censorship for satellites could become a geopolitical possibility, as countries attempt to prevent satellite transmission by jamming or even by overt anti-satellite activity. There is little likelihood that domestic satellites would be direct targets of some politically unstable situation in the world, but the weapons and equipment used would not be discriminating and would probably disrupt the transmission of domestic programming.

HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE

The programming position held by the US television networks and the cable operators in the early 1980s will not be the same at the beginning of the 1990s. The home electronic entertainment and education centre will place hardware items in the hands of the consumer which are software-selective. The programming

for these specific units will be acquired as needed and used, and re-used. Also the presence of the home computer with an interactive gaming capability will provide alternative software to networked television programming and draw viewing attention away from what is known as television in today's media world.

A very special case can be made for the use of the electronic newspaper, or teletext systems. Britain already has the BBC's Ceefax (see the facts), the IBA's Oracle and British Telecom's Prestel systems, and the concept is now being tested in the United States. The feature is built into the television receiver; the use of a companion controller box turns off regular programming for a specified time while up to 200 pages of detailed information can be called to the screen. The obvious potential for commercial elimination by the viewer suggests the decline in network income a device such as teletext could cause.

It does not matter what is entertaining the viewer if the networked programming from television or cable is being ignored. The network programme ratings will show the fact that viewers have turned off the commercial to catch tomorrow's weather. That is already happening, with the current multi-channel cable systems and remote control boxes. Consider the viewer affinity for teletext, with hundreds of pages of news, financial and shopping information, airline schedules, etc. The playing of a game of chess with someone in Seattle is off-line to network television programming. The whole thrust of the home entertainment centre will be based on diversity of choice. Satellites and 50 to 100 channel cable systems are here today; the adoption of full electronic newspaper and home computer activity is just around the corner.

The pattern of which video hardware achieves common usage depends on manufacturing, on marketing trends, research and development in the audio and video industries. The unknown factors are functions of externals, such as petroleum economics and international financing. The export needs of Japan are based on economic survival since Japan must import most of its raw materials. The consumer electronics industry in Japan, which heavily influences the US market, also depends upon world sales for any given product line. The ability to saturate a specific video-disc or video-tape unit into the homes of America will influence the choice of software by the consumer. The availability of a favoured movie for \$15, or the rental of several films on tape for \$10, may eventually supersede the use of pay cable. It is far too early to predict all this with any certainty, but the software could well follow the patterns established by the hardware in the home.

PIRACY AND COPYRIGHT

The fourth element that could upset the pace of technological change is the theft of software from the legitimate owner of the rights to a particular programme.

The danger is that the financial incentive would be removed by the siphoning off of legitimate sales. The difference between piracy and copyright circumvention is minimal at the cash register; in theory it represents the difference between copying and illegal resale or barter of programming, and the use of material legally without compensation, as on the various satellite super stations.

Outright theft of feature or other programming takes place in many ways. A film print may be borrowed from a theatre or film lab, although the rising cost of silver and difficulty in making a decent clandestine film print complicate this route, at least for ultimate video consumption. The transfer of a video-tape to another video-tape is much easier, especially with the quality of one-inch and three-quarter inch video-tape recorders available today. Both these methods of obtaining access to feature material are high risk in terms of enforcement. More difficult to police are those who are drawing programming directly from pay movies on satellite, or from microwave based Multi-Point Distribution Systems (MDS). Illicit reception and multiple re-use are very common with these systems. On-air pay TV is even being unscrambled.

The answer to electronic theft of any kind is to secure entertainment programming in the same way that the military secures all command, control and communications (C³) information: with digitisation and encryption. The use of random numerical sequencing codes that can be removed only with a correctly keyed solution at a receiver would satisfy the need for programme security. The same kind of techniques could be used to secure most video transmission. The problem is the cost of retrofitting existing systems.

The protection of copyright has had a severe blow through the legal definition of home copying; however, the mass marketing of low-priced movie discs may make copying uneconomical. If a blank tape costs \$19, and a video-disc retails for \$15, then there is no incentive to record a programme. Similarly, the use of court cases to test the position on various infringements, such as the current satellite inquiry as to super station rebroadcast without compensation, could well establish more favourable precedents for copyright owners. Before a total solution is found, there will have to be some technical research and development by the feature programme producers to find an industry-wide product encoding system as the ultimate form of protection.

CONCLUSIONS

The future of home entertainment seems destined to merge with the future of theatrical entertainment in general. It is very easy to be upbeat and predict that the prospect is bright and limitless. It is well within the bounds of reality to suggest that the theatrical motion picture will have a new cycle of release: a cycle

that will begin with first-run theatre exposure, then shift to release on video-disc and tape as second-run theatre release occurs, followed by pay cable and subscription TV, and concluding with network television exposure with commercial insertions. The number of video channels that will be available for home entertainment could well exceed 100. New cable system proposals around the United States are calling for channel capacity in excess of one hundred. The use of satellites now and in the future will increase the number of programme sources that cable and subscription television can offer. The advent of fibre optics linkages into the home will provide the home computer and entertainment centre with hundreds of input options. By 1990, the saturation of video-disc and/or tape could well exceed 50 per cent, and the same thing could be said of cable or other forms of subscription television, such as on-air and multi-point distribution systems. The need for new product would be significant, causing vast expansion of film and television studios and production organisations.

The difficulty with all this is the presence of the four horsemen. The one factor which unifies the uncertainty of production is that much of the need for enhanced home entertainment comes from consumer demand. The careful gauging of what the consumer wants is one of the most important factors involved in creating the demand for home entertainment. The issue of standards is quite important when it is placed in context with the television set or the vacuum cleaner. The real mass market for video-disc and/or video-tape will be with standard units requiring a minimum of upkeep. The average consumer wants to buy entertainment; not his or her own television station.

The use of satellites and many other devices on the radio frequency spectrum depends upon the concept of regulation in 'the public's interest' over 'the public's airwaves'. The public really does not make the judgments; the authority is delegated in the US through Congress to various agencies such as the Federal Communications Commission. The need is to provide a maximum of service at a minimum of cost. The consumer does not care how the signal reaches the home, only that it gets there. The emergence of several alternative transmission systems for visual entertainment will be successful if the costs are kept down. It is useful to view the current trend in airline deregulation. The pluses of lower cost and better service have not necessarily been achieved. Many cities now have fewer flights serving their community, and at higher prices. Again, the public's wants should be defined by the public.

The provision of hardware that generates an alternative software market is a function of good research and development. If a home computer can play chess, balance the cheque book, replay last year's super bowl game, and teach the cooking of quiche lorraine, the competition has to be stimulating. The in-home

presence of theatrical and/or network television product will depend on the quality versus the price. If the home market is serviced with affordable entertainment, then the entertainment software will be in demand. If the same cost factors that currently dictate the \$5 to \$15 million theatrical film budgets are applied to home entertainment, then the competition may well beat the price. The entire world is part of the home entertainment market-place, and to be truly competitive there must be entertainment the consumer can afford, and will want to afford.

The question of piracy is actually very simple in solution, and illustrates how

various factors are interconnected. The use of a system such as a standard video-disc could well provide theatrical product at a retail price of under \$20. This would be the most powerful incentive not to buy pirate product or copy from other channels of home input. The name of the game is to sit down and enjoy some form of entertainment; not to travel to some pirate store and buy a blank tape and record.

Given the nature of the future, as defined by energy and the current high cost of outside entertainment, home entertainment seems assured in every household. What is not a sure thing is which video and/or visual components

will be in this home media centre, and what entertainment software will be used by each family unit. The factors of cost, simplicity, reliability and ease of operation may well outweigh the sophistication of the programming being offered. It seems probable that if the technology is offered to meet the above criteria, then it will reach mass market status and bring the software along with it. But there are no guarantees, and any vigorous attempt to establish market dominance will have to be made with the full knowledge that consumer confidence and interest is really the most valuable commodity the entertainment industry has at its command. ■

JAMES MONACO

SUPERMARKET—COMMODITIES

IMAGES AND SOUNDS AS CULTURAL COMMODITIES

The American film industry now depends on export markets for as much as half its revenues worldwide and domestic. During a typical year several hundred hours of theatrical film product will be distributed in dozens of countries, in addition to several thousand hours of television programming. More than 300 hours of *Bonanza*, for example, is available for worldwide syndication, and scores of national television companies avail themselves regularly of the cheap and tolerably popular programming which such a show represents. During the last fifteen years literally billions of hours of viewing time have been spent consuming *Bonanza* and the values and ideas upon which that programme is based (to say nothing of the hundreds of other shows which are its ideological companions).

There is no doubt of the extent and pervasiveness of American domination of world markets. During the last ten years the percentage of world screens devoted to Hollywood films and TV has increased rather than lessened. No wonder, then, that cultural imperialism is a perennial topic at international conferences on the state of the art and industry. Yet critiques of the American position in world image and sound markets seldom go far beyond noting the imbalance between American imports and the native product in any particular country and decrying that fact while attempting, rather ephemerally, to gauge the effect of those imports on native cultures.

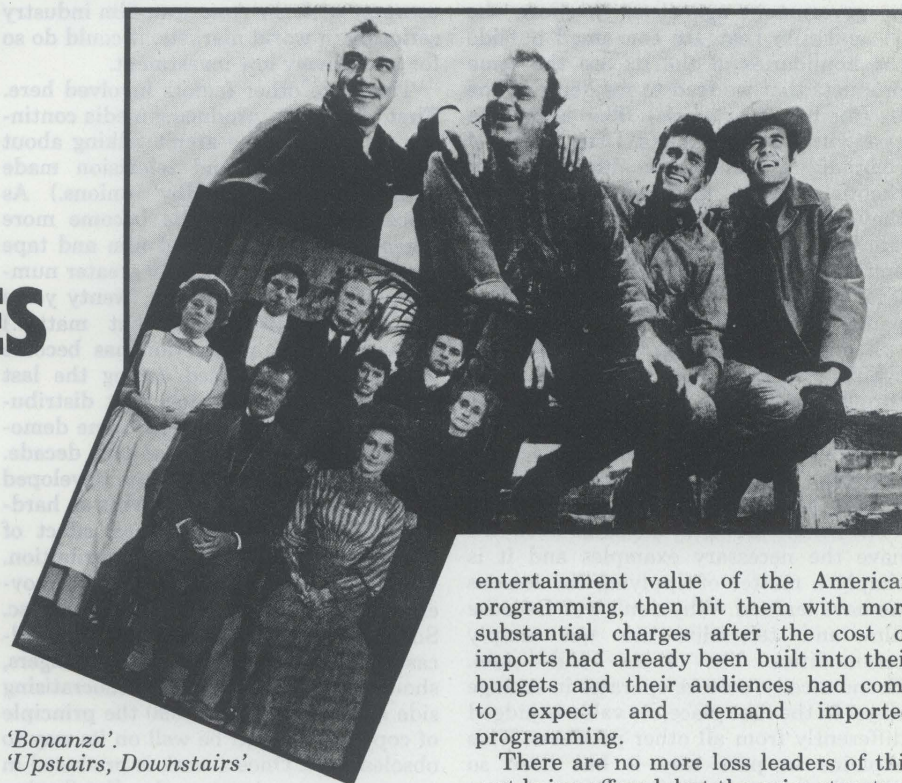
During the 70s we learned to be more

'Bonanza'.
'Upstairs, Downstairs'.

precise about such cultural influences through the application of pseudo-scientific critical methods, but our analysis is no more accurate than it was ten or fifteen years ago. Perhaps we have been asking the wrong questions. Let me try to rephrase a few.

ECONOMIC DOMINATION

Let's assume that film and television are economic commodities like any others. Clearly, the strength of the American position in world markets is, first of all, the result of an aggressive—sometimes belligerent—marketing strategy. For twenty years and more US companies have been dumping entertainment product in Europe, Australia and the Third World. There was a time in the 60s when the cost of buying an American half-hour television show for broadcast in, say, Ireland, barely paid the freight. Often such programming was offered as a sort of 'loss leader'. Get station executives used to the low cost and high quotient of



entertainment value of the American programming, then hit them with more substantial charges after the cost of imports had already been built into their budgets and their audiences had come to expect and demand imported programming.

There are no more loss leaders of this sort being offered, but the price structure worldwide still amounts to a kind of 'dumping' strategy which plays havoc with national efforts at the development of film and television industries that can stand on their own. The price of an hour and a half of *Columbo* to an Australian station manager is still only a fraction of the cost of producing original programming. For his money, the Australian executive obtains high-quality popular programming; and he may even justify the purchase by figuring that the money he saves during this hour and a half can be better applied later to more relevant, local programming. Clearly, the only way out of this dilemma is to pass quota laws limiting imports. Otherwise the cost accounting simply remains irresistible.

It is worth noting, however, that such market-flooding operations are not only international in scope. American networks dominate local broadcasters in much the same way. No station owner in Portland, Oregon, can afford to produce programming of the sort the network offers; and the network, too, has set the

style of programming that local station owners' audiences have come to expect. The same sort of bind is operating.

TV and film aren't, of course, the only products that get 'dumped' in this way. Recently attention has focused on the arguably more dangerous and damaging effect of dumping American foodstuffs and drugs, especially in Third World countries. The entertainment marketed abroad is essentially the same as that consumed at home. A few films may attract an audience in Europe or the Third World which they didn't find at home, but no movie is produced exclusively for the foreign market and no television series continues in production for export sales after an American network has axed it from the schedule. (We are ignoring pure propaganda produced by government agencies.) In short, the TV and film that are consumed outside the boundaries of the US are the same products that we feed to residents of the US (for better or worse). This is not the case with other products. Drug and food companies traditionally dump inferior products—those that for some reason they can't find a market for domestically. There is a serious ethical question here and the practice should be subject to legal constraints. But film and TV companies are not guilty in the same way.

Economically, the only way to guard against American cultural domination is through quota laws. Historically, the only countries to achieve a measure of success in keeping the flood of American entertainment product under some sort of control have done so through such laws. That debate seems to me to be over. We have the necessary examples and it is simply a matter of applying the lessons we have learned. Why don't we? Because film and television are not simply commodities like shoes and steel. Economically, culture operates in strange ways. In the first place, its value is judged differently from all other products. This explains in part why it has been so difficult for many nations to counteract the American industrial entertainment presence. It also, paradoxically, offers some real hope to forces in those countries who want to redress the balance.

CAPITAL

Unlike most commodities, the costs of film and television are front-loaded. The price of a print is minimal compared to the cost of shooting and editing the negative. It is this fact of life which has made cultural dumping so easy. Even domestically, for example, television producers don't receive enough return from networks to cover production expenses. They look to domestic and international syndication to make their profit.

More important than the front-loading phenomenon is the relationship between investment and profit. While those critics within the film world take it as a truism that the huge and powerful entertainment conglomerates are the root of the problem, the arithmetical fact remains that the media industries, as such things

are measured, are really minor factors in the national economic equation. Eliminate the entire American film industry, for example, and the economic effect would be hardly significant—as if one industrial company had gone out of business. If automobile sales in the US go down five per cent in a year, that is noteworthy but no cause for front page headlines—yet that small difference would have more than twice the economic impact of the disappearance of the entire American film industry.

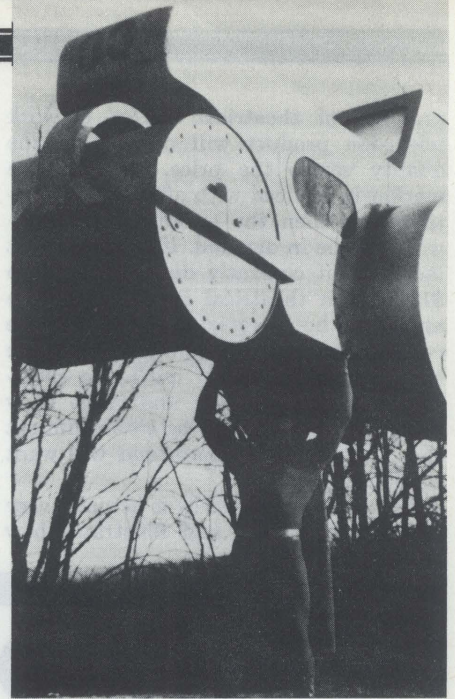
In other words, measured simply as an economic activity, film and television are rather easily manageable. An outright ban on American products in, say, Switzerland would have a negligible effect on the Swiss economy. More important, should the Swiss government decide to compete with the American film industry seriously in world markets, it could do so for a relatively low investment.

There are other factors involved here. First, the cost of producing media continues to decline. (We aren't talking about American movies and television made with American 'standby' unions.) As price declines the media become more democratic. Production of film and tape is now open to significantly greater numbers of people than it was twenty years ago. (So is print, for that matter.) Second, just as production has become markedly democratised during the last twenty years, so it seems that distribution will be subject to those same democratising forces during the next decade. The technology that has been developed to find new products to market as hardware also has the unforeseen effect of opening up channels of distribution. Worldwide, pirates have already discovered the wonders of video-tape and disc. Soon, the rest of us will. Satellite broadcasting, despite its very grave dangers, should also have such a democratising side effect. Indeed, by 1990 the principle of copyright should be well on its way to obsolescence. Once a work is produced in any medium and enters the distribution channels, it will belong simply to those who want to own it. This will drastically change the economic function of film and television, but that's another story.

RAW MATERIALS

A Third World country with a one-commodity neo-colonial economic system depends on imperial First and Second World powers to process and buy that commodity, and is relatively powerless to escape its role as open market. Moreover, this makes it difficult if not impossible to accumulate capital which could be used to finance an independent economy. This has little, if anything, to do with media. Great movies aren't mined, they're invented, out of intellectual whole cloth. As such, they are the one product a developing nation can sell to the rest of the world which doesn't depend on that nation being endowed with some curious mineral or strange quirk of climate that happens to have value to others.

Anyone can, at least ideally, become a



Need Spain's humble 'Supersonic Man'

major film and television power. The raw materials are available in equal measure to all and the capital requirements are modest. Moreover, for a number of reasons such an enterprise can have an extraordinary effect on a country's overall economic health. What I'm suggesting may seem a radical departure from received opinion on the subject of international film and television relations. Yet if—with Jean-Luc Godard—we return to zero and reconstruct the theoretical model of cultural imperialism, much of this must be self-evident.

That the capital requirements for cultural production are very small is an arithmetical fact. This is even more true, by the way, for printed materials: the book industry, for example, is notoriously undercapitalised. From the point of view of an accountant conversant with general business requirements, the book industry is remarkably anomalous—and this is true, the necessary changes being made, for film and television as well. We only think audiovisual media are expensive because we insist on judging money requirements in terms of household economics. Yes, producing a film is enormously more expensive than buying a year's worth of food. But it is much less expensive than designing, manufacturing and marketing, for example, a new kitchen gadget—and the economic risk is probably smaller.

That cultural raw materials are no less available to the smallest and poorest nation than to the largest and richest is also self-evident. One may argue that malnutrition makes it difficult to develop an aesthetic of cinema. That's true, so far as it goes. ('Erst kommt das Fressen,' Brecht said. 'First comes the grub.') But the argument is specious. To extend the industrial model further: training and equipment are also easily acquired. Each year it becomes easier to operate a film or video camera. Each year amateur systems more closely approach the quality levels of 'professional' equipment. Cameras, editing tables, projectors can be leased. You can't lease a steel furnace.



... always be a pale shadow of the mighty 'Superman'?

That quota systems can effectively limit the American presence in a particular country is less sure. We have certain examples to prove that quotas do work. Why, then, don't more countries institute such systems? This is the difficult question. Here comes the bad news.

QUOTAS AND POPULARITY

In part, cultural quotas are much less common than they might be because the managers of national cultural industries are tied in to the American system, just as the managers of other industries in developing nations know their place as employers in dependent client states. This shifts the struggle to the level of internal politics. The decision to impose or not to impose quotas is dependent on the balance of power between nationalists and subsidiaries of American—and international—interests. Partly, too, the absence of quotas is a function of the structure of international distribution. Quotas can still have a moderating effect, but this power will be significantly reduced in years to come as the control of 'distribution' shifts from producers to consumers. The piracy phenomenon indicates the direction of the future; satellites will accelerate this process as producers/distributors lose the power of limited publication which has been the controlling factor in the equation of their profit structure since the invention of film.

But there is a third reason, and I think a much more important one, for an absence of quotas. Bluntly stated, American films and television are so extraordinarily pervasive worldwide because audiences find them both useful and entertaining—often more so than native product. In other words, American movies and TV are popular because they're popular. This is very often not the case with the films and television of other Western countries, Third World countries, and—certainly—Second World countries.

Theorists of American cultural

domination may wish that public tastes were different, and perhaps any respectable film critic sees the development of public taste as a prime goal, but the fact remains that American films appeal to a wide audience. And this is true not only because they are so often finely tuned entertainment machines, but also because—sometimes to a surprising degree—they manage despite themselves to treat subjects about which people care. This is especially true of recent American made-for-television films, but it is also true of features.

Then, too, we have several good examples of national film industries which do quite well in the face of the American presence simply because they have developed either lively native genres or a topical relevance that does appeal to native audiences. India and Japan are the prime examples, still creating more film product each year than American commercial studios (although not realizing comparable profits since their product is less easily exportable). The Cuban film industry has shown how attractive human and political relevance can be to home audiences. If the French film industry has lost ground both at home and abroad during the last ten years, perhaps that is not so much a function of the aggressiveness of the American film industry as it is a sign of a real crisis of values in the French industry itself.

So the major factor which we have to confront is that, in world markets, American entertainment products do as well as they do at least in part because their producers provide a generally higher level of quality. This 'quality', of course, has not necessarily anything to do with aesthetics or any other critical yardstick. It has to do with the value of films and television as commodities.

NATIONALISM

Certainly in other Western cultures, and often in the Third World, this imbalance is directly related to differences in our conception of the function of movies and

television. It is safe to say that in Europe film and TV are still produced for a higher class level. Partly this is a result of a tradition which insists on treating film as art (still a very un-American attitude, despite the new Hollywood generation of graduate film students). Partly it is a result of the way the film and television industries are structured. It is arguable that film and television in Europe (and more often than one might expect in the Third World) are much more directed to bourgeois audiences and better reflect bourgeois values than their American counterparts.

In order to get round this annoying critical dilemma, we have developed a theory—accepted far too readily by critics on the left—that somehow everybody who likes and responds to American movies and TV has been brainwashed. Most certainly it is wrong to think that the values and aspirations of mass audiences are accurately reflected in the product that is sold to them. Until a complete range of ideas and feelings is presented to audiences, and each film has equal publicity, that sort of conclusion is thoroughly misleading. However, the fact remains that audiences *do* respond to American-style film and television and they often do so for good reasons. Not to accept this interpretation is to increase the size of the lumpenproletariat to outrageous (and absurd) proportions.

Even more important than the real commodity value of the American product is the structure of the world market in which it is sold. The growth of nationalist sentiment during the last twenty years shows no sign of abating. Indeed, recent developments suggest that nationalism will remain a powerful force for many years. But, paradoxically, nationalism has such appeal now because it is a direct reaction to an increasingly homogeneous world culture. And the growth of that world culture continues even as the appeal of nationalism does.

Despite the real cultural values of nationalism, such approaches are losing propositions. Consider the ironic position of Jean Rouch. After filming African tribal rituals for many years, Rouch is now regarded, one of his collaborators tells me, as a leading authority on tribal life and habits. Rouch's subjects often ask him how a particular ritual should be performed. He shows them his films. The result is that these new performances are more historically precise than they otherwise could have been. The problem is that Rouch has directly intervened in the organic development of the culture. He has been a strong conservative influence, and in the end an alien one. The rituals that have been preserved to be re-enacted on the model of the film record are comparable to endangered, soon-to-be-extinct species reconstructed through genetic engineering. They are more real—like all great art—than the real thing. But they are not the real thing. Psychologically, the one massive effect of the film medium has been to lead us to this current situation in which we refuse to accept the past as actually past.

AMERICA IN THE WORLD

Not only is the world culture eventually irresistible, for better or worse, but the American presence within it—and domination of it—is both more complex than we have been led to believe and less threatening than we generally understand. (This doesn't make the world culture any less problematical.)

One reason American culture still enjoys a significant degree of international popularity may well be its most salient characteristic: its promiscuity. American culture simply doesn't exist without its African and European progenitors, and despite occasional outbursts of 'Americanism' it continues to accept almost any input. The idea of reversing the current relations between the US and the rest of the world, of setting up boundaries and quotas, to protect Americans from foreign influence, is no longer tenable. In fact, a relevant argument in American domestic cultural politics remains the dominance of European standards. This is not nearly so important as it was before 1960, but the issue still exists. In this respect, American culture is immune to cultural aggrandisement: it has no virtue left to protect.

A corollary is that American cultural commodities exist in part because of the export market in which they are sold. If there were no interest abroad in such products, some of them wouldn't exist. It is hard to conceive of the US going to war to preserve television markets as it might to preserve oil sources. Culture is not that important.

Any American who travels to Europe is fascinated by the reflection of himself that he sees. Europeans between the ages of ten and thirty are far more essentially American in style than many Americans. The recent jeans phenomenon is a good example of this. For many years, Americans were perfectly happy with the limited choice of Levis, Lees and occasionally Wranglers—all of them classic styles produced cheaply for utilitarian purposes. Then Eastern Europeans discovered the cachet of this proletarian style. Western Europeans took it up, adding a bourgeois sense of fashion. Before the Western European fad for jeans no one had thought actually to iron a crease in them, or flare the trouser legs, or change the stitching on the pockets. This new conception of the aesthetic and marketing possibilities of what we used to call 'dungarees' was then re-exported to the US where it has, in turn, resulted in a national mania and perhaps a significant increase in television advertising rates. The point is that one hand washes the other. The conception of Europe as the helpless victim of American cultural rape is absurd.

And any European cultural authority that seriously wished to compete equally with American firms would have no trouble in doing so. Polygram, one of the two major forces in the recording business, is a good example. A Dutch-German

creation, Polygram doesn't even have exportable native musical products to exploit: it operates without prejudice in the international market. Lord Grade has shown that it is not even necessary to produce a competitive level of quality to compete successfully. None of this has anything to do with the quality of media as art: it has only to do with the quality of media as commodities, but that is the first step. One of our dilemmas is in attempting to deal simultaneously with the economic and social-political-artistic functions of film and television.

In addition, not only is the international market relatively open to those who wish to compete on its terms, but the American presence in it can be expected to decline slowly during the next ten or fifteen years, just as the currency has and as the presence in other export markets has. During the last ten years the US has shown itself surprisingly vulnerable to aggressive import campaigns. We no longer control our own television/radio hardware market; and we are only a few years away from losing

control of the automobile market, shocking as that may seem. There is, then, no foreseeable reason why the US would not be just as vulnerable in its cultural markets.

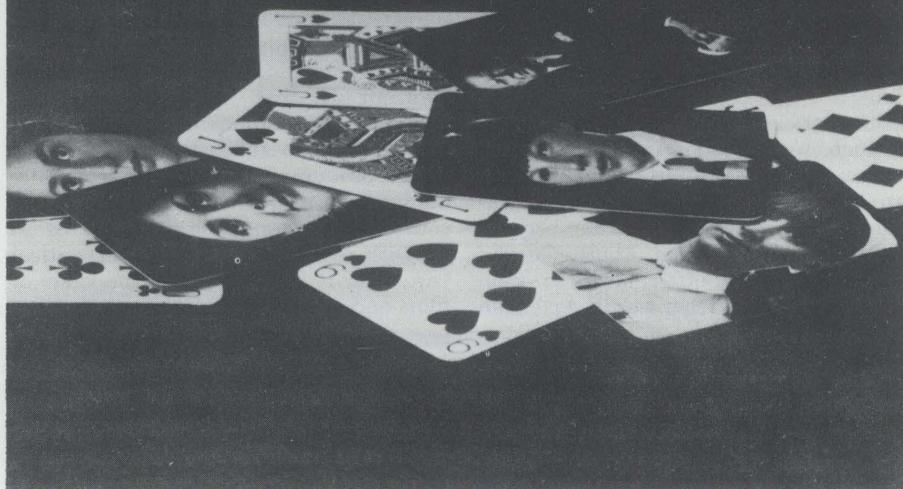
THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

The reason US cultural markets have not yet been invaded has as much to do with European attitudes towards the function of film and television as it has to do with American domination of world markets. So long as film is considered an art it obviously competes at a significant disadvantage. The struggle to raise the aesthetic or political level of the medium must not be confused with its position in the market-place.

As a simple export commodity, it should be remembered, film and television don't amount to much on the foreign exchange market. This is one reason national economic planners perhaps don't take the media industries as seriously as they might. But it has become clear—and here the American

JOHN PYM

LOVE AND PROPERTY ANDREA NEWMAN'S MACKENZIE



post-war experience is crucial—that culture has a multiplier effect. Cultural exports are often the vanguard. As economics professor Dallas Smythe put it several years ago: ‘The distribution of television programs around the world, from the United States . . . has the double purpose of making money for itself and serving as the frontrunner for the industry of the country which produced it. It is a form of advertisement; it is like the battleships, gunboats, which used to show the flag . . .’ (Network Project 10.)

Cultural products set an image for a nation which later redounds to considerable effect financially. Judged in this light, culture should be regarded as one of the most important lynchpins of a national economic programme. It offers one of the few areas where wealth can be created quickly without great investment of capital and labour and without the necessity of being endowed with natural resources. We are assuming a capitalist system, of course. And this seems correct. Except on the low level of independent film, international economic relation-

ships operate this way, no matter whether the participants declare themselves as nominal capitalists or erstwhile socialists.

It is not far off the mark to put it this way: American domination of world cultural markets during the last twenty-five years has taken place largely because other nations have defaulted. It is not as if the US suppressed another country's cultural exports (as it did, say, with the pineapple trade at the turn of the century). Nor did the US have a technological head start (as it did, for example, in telephony); most European countries had access to the same film and television technology at the same time, and in several instances Europeans had a lead.

The continuing domination of world culture markets is largely a matter of decisions which must be made internally in Europe and the Third World.

□ On the international level, it is clearly possible for many other nations to compete effectively if they wish to do so.

□ On the local level, the question of quota systems must be faced. Eventually,

national cultures will have to find some way to come to terms with the world culture. This makes it all the more important to shape aggressive policies to participate in the world market.

□ Finally, it is necessary to free ourselves of romantic conceptions of media products as primarily aesthetic and realise their essential economic nature. For example: it no longer makes much sense to speak of theatrical film as an industry separate from television. It is, rather, simply an elite sub-category of TV and its aesthetics as well as its economics are controlled by television. Similarly, we speak of film and television as separate from print and records only as a matter of intellectual convenience; any programme of cultural development such as I have suggested would have to consider the broad range of the media, both print and non-print, and be based on an understanding of their interaction. We also must see culture in its relationship to the complete range of economic activity. Once we do so, some exciting possibilities may present themselves for the future. ■

SUPERMARKET-PROPERTY

The key to one chamber in the Corporate mind can be found in the opening title sequence of BBC Television's autumn serial *Mackenzie*, the turbulent, 19-year saga of a Scottish speculative builder turned London-based property tycoon. In all but the first episode (in which we are introduced to Robert Mackenzie sharply concluding a small, early but significant deal), brief recapitulatory pre-credit sequences dissolve, over Tony Isaacs' signature tune, into a tracking shot along a house of playing-cards, from the plain sides of which stare the serial's solemn faced principals. The camera pulls back and the cards collapse; the title comes up, followed by the name of the author, Andrea Newman. All other cast and technical credits are reserved for an end roller. Andrea Newman, creator of the LWT serials *Bouquet of Barbed Wire* and *Another Bouquet*, is unquestionably the bankable name.

The first *Bouquet*, which was transmitted over seven weeks early in 1976, steadily edged up Jictar's national Top Twenty league, gaining a final audience of 7.45 million homes. The serial, which tackled the subject of incest, gained a packet of reviews chiefly characterised by their shocked fascination, and was subsequently sold to TV in New Zealand, Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Greece, Yugoslavia, Belgium, Finland, France, Canada and Australia.

Mackenzie, its makers hope, will prove equally addictive viewing. Shortly before the start of video-taping, its producer George Gallaccio broadly equated the series in terms of budget and anticipated audience to *Telford's Change*. Compared to the tone of Andrea Newman's characteristically unbuttoned manner of address, however, *Telford's Change*—with its restrained middle-class subject matter and its surprisingly absorbing excursions into the realms of provincial

banking—is notably tame fare. The additive ingredients of *Mackenzie*, for the susceptible, do not derive from an insider's view of the British property business, and its evolution during the 50s and 60s, although in fleshing out Mackenzie's professional ventures the author received detailed technical help from a merchant banker and, particularly, a property consultant (who taped model business conversations). Rather it derives from a relentless, artificially created whirlpool of personal relationships: a judicious mix of close-up psychological 'reality' and a telescoped, magnified time scale. Confrontations are forever in the offing; there are scarcely any troughs.

Unlike *Bouquet of Barbed Wire*, which Andrea Newman adapted from one of her own novels, *Mackenzie* came from an original idea—albeit one which arose in response to a request for a follow-up, if not another sequel to *Bouquet*—and posed substantially different narrative hurdles from the earlier serial. *Bouquet's* time scale covered a few months; the viewer was plunged in *media res*. *Mackenzie* required the slow introduction of, at first, six disparate principals and the careful establishment of their interrelationship: the lines of friendship, infidelity, business and kinship cross and recross the narrative; emotional time-bombs, on fuses of varying lengths, have innocently to be deposited along the way.

In a move after taping and editing, the first two of the original thirteen episodes were merged in order to establish (and quickly dispose of) the serial's 'Scottishness'—like Mackenzie himself, both Gallaccio and the first of the serial's two directors, Kenny McBain, are London-based Scots—to fix the web of relationships and then, as it were, to start the story proper when the tunnel-visioned hero (the Scottish-born actor Jack Galloway), his reluctant wife Jean (Kara

Wilson) and their two young sons leave Glasgow to seek their fortune in England. In an important sense, the story is not exclusively 'British': by excluding in the body of the serial a peculiarly nationalistic consideration of class—Mackenzie's elevation into the upper-middle class does not, tellingly, bring with it problems of acceptance—Andrea Newman has unquestionably broadened her narrative appeal. Finns and Belgians could comprehend the characters' motives. Regionalism is out: this, at heart, is a notably emblematic, fictional tale of 'universal' emotional entanglements and almost abstract 'business practices'.

The decision to combine the first two original episodes was not taken, ostensibly, to give *Mackenzie* a head start over the BBC's other new autumn offerings. It came after Graeme McDonald, the BBC Drama Group's Head of Series and Serials, agreed with the makers (and had the idea approved sight unseen by Bill Cotton, the Channel Controller) that the hook would not be firmly implanted in the audience until the end of Episode Two. By which time Mackenzie was established in London and had embarked on his key affair with model Diana Crawley (Sheila Ruskin), natural daughter of George Kovacs (Richard Marner), a Hungarian émigré merchant banker (subsequently Mackenzie's business partner), who has in turn a mistress, Ruth (Lynda Bellingham), wife of estate agent David Isaacs (Toby Salaman), the personal friend who has given Mackenzie his London break . . . The serial is marked throughout by this kind of breathlessness.

On top of this, we are also, by this juncture, privy to Mackenzie's brief affair with Ruth in Glasgow (a liaison which will have repercussions much later); the seeds of his central rivalry with his older son Jamie; the dissension within



Andrea Newman.

Mackenzie's family—his disaffection with his mother for remarrying after his father's death; the bitterness of Jean's hypochondriac mother that her daughter married outside the Roman Catholic church. Addiction to this sophisticated, and predominantly well acted brand of melodrama depends initially—and once addicted the audience is assumed, though there is as yet no way of checking on the individual viewer's constancy, to be corralled for the run—on the detailed establishment of *recognisable* personal entanglements, both complicated and clear enough to be the source of endless at-home speculations. One may observe, perhaps, the most perfect example of this addiction—from a Controller's point of view—in the *Observer* television critic's chronic and unashamed obsession with the overblown shenanigans of the Ewing family of *Dallas*.

The fashioning of *Mackenzie* has been a prolonged operation (and at the time of writing, several weeks before the start of transmission, it is too soon to predict whether the BBC's efforts will in fact yield the expected return). A certain reticence by all concerned marks comments about the early stages of Andrea Newman's contact with the Corporation. Graeme McDonald said, 'I believe that *Mackenzie* was shown with understandable loyalty to LWT, but more or less coincident with Andrea wanting to write something came this sudden call that the BBC was interested.' Andrea Newman herself remains reluctantly silent on this point, saying only that the idea for the series germinated following a request in 1976 for something to follow *Another Bouquet*. An acquaintance was having an argument with his grown-up son: a synopsis evolved. '*Mackenzie* started from the idea of a father-son rivalry and I worked backwards from that,' she said. 'As trivial a thing as that. A self-made man who gives his son all the advantages that he didn't have. I think the father-son battle is more interesting than sibling battles, for obvious Freudian reasons. If the early marriage breaks, you have poor-boy-made-good ditches first wife; en route to the top acquires second glossier



Robert Mackenzie (Jack Galloway).

wife—you see it in the papers every day—and resentful son.'

When the idea was first presented to McDonald, Mackenzie's profession had already switched from film producer to newspaper owner. 'I said I would not be interested in that because the BBC had just done *The Standard* which was about a Scots newspaper,' McDonald said. The change to property development was effected. 'I'm very interested in property, I dabble in properties,' Andrea Newman said. 'Property fitted in very neatly, and accidentally. The story's span allows the children to grow up from five to twenty-four. We made it from 1955 to '74, and then found that the storyline fitted because we'd hit the property boom and the property slump. There was a lot of fast footwork around the redesign.' The idea progressed from a three-page synopsis to a thirteen-page episode breakdown. 'I wanted to follow *Bouquet* with something different yet similar,' she said. 'The *Bouquet* serials covered a matter of months; this covers nineteen years, three interwoven families. It is twice the length, and also has the "problem" of the property background and the regional background, and it also involved a certain amount of research into modelling. I thought initially about what I would like to watch, rather than what I ought to write next. What would I like to see on my television screen assuming someone else was writing it.'

What the BBC wanted, however, was something identifiably by Andrea Newman, who was reckoned, significantly, to be one of only a small band of British writers with the constitution for prolonged series writing. 'One of my personal aims,' McDonald said, 'is to get original writing, as well as dramatisation, on to the screen, and the number of writers who have the stamina for a twelve-part, or even a ten-part series, is very small. They aren't exactly queuing up to write. It's a British phenomenon. In America, there are many who can write to this length, but not of this quality—perhaps that's the key to it.' The series, according to Gallaccio, was budgeted at approximately £1 million (including all internal costs), though he



Ruth (Lynda Bellingham) . . .

had originally hoped for £1.5 million. No 'research' as such as done into Andrea Newman's potential. She was approached on McDonald's 'hunch' after, in his own words, he had been 'besotted with the original pair.'

Andrea Newman was commissioned for the serial in December 1977, and writing began in January. Working at the rate of one episode every six weeks, thirteen episodes were completed by October 1979. McDonald made no attempt to intervene in the shaping of the serial having once accepted the outline. 'In an overall sense I was responsible, but the actual intimate work was entirely theirs.' By theirs he referred to the author and her two script editors, Colin Tucker (for the first four episodes) and Kerry Crabbe (for the remainder). The producer George Gallaccio, selected for the project by McDonald ('George was a member of the department and became a producer on loan to Scotland; I wanted to give him a good chance to find his feet as a major producer in London, and I really could not think of a better thing to give him'), only entered the picture in spring 1979 when all but the last episode had been written. 'At one time I was thinking of doing it in twenty-six episodes and then retiring,' Andrea Newman said. 'I had a fantasy that it would be nice to do a long serial and then someone else could take over and it would go on for ever, like *Coronation Street*.' In reality, however, by Episode 13, fatigue had set in, and the last lap—the most emotionally heightened—proved the most arduous.

Andrea Newman compares her relationship with the script editors—to whom, along with the property consultant Charles Price, she gratefully dedicates her novelisation of *Mackenzie*—as having the primary effect of forced feeding. Acting rather like deadlines on journalists, they speeded the process of composition. 'The order of play' was sorted out in long conferences, after which, bearing sheets of itemised notes, she departed to write up or rewrite the episodes. The Scottish background was an early constant, other identifiable regional backgrounds, in the author's



and David (Toby Salaman).



Kovacs (Richard Marner) and Ruth.



On set: Kovacs, Diana (Sheila Ruskin).

opinion, such as Geordie and Yorkshire, having already been taken. She did not herself have an intimate knowledge of Glasgow, though she had twice visited the city, and part of McDonald's choice of Gallaccio and Gallaccio's choice of McBain derived from this fact. McBain in fact wrote two brief atmospheric pub scenes which effectively establish the substance of Mackenzie's life in Glasgow. When the scripts were completed—some 700 pages, which shows the sheer wordage involved—the fine work began. 'I had filled the studio twice over with sets,' Andrea Newman said, and these, on Gallaccio's suggestion, were fairly drastically trimmed. Dialogue is the author's strong suit, and when in doubt, it seems, she sits her characters down with drinks in their hands and food in front of them. The drinking—tea, whisky, coffee, sherry, beer—remains an incessant feature of the serial; the number of actual meals, however, has been considerably reduced.

Production of the first seven (originally eight) episodes took place in the spring and early summer. Video-tape was used exclusively, though the later episodes, directed by Roger Cheveley, which have just started production at the time of writing and have perforce to be omitted from this consideration, were partly shot on film. McBain, a Harvard-educated Glaswegian who came to television through the BBC's director training programme from a background in the theatre, notably a period as associate director of the Prospect Theatre Company, takes a fairly steady view of the content of *Mackenzie*. His efforts, he said, have partly been directed at playing down the scripts' sensationalism. He remains pleased with the performances, an aspect of the production on which he placed particular emphasis. Four episodes of *Dr Who*, his last assignment for the BBC, went some way towards preparing him for the rigours of studio production in under-estimated time slots, but not for a tight ten-week schedule at thirty-six different locations. He has, he acknowledged, been learning on his feet. He takes, like the author herself, a fairly dim view of expletives; though her taste

for bedroom scenes is perhaps greater than his. In fact, the risqué elements of the serial have turned out in the event, as so often, considerably less 'sensational' than one might have expected. McBain queried an unequivocal hand gesture by Diana; Gallaccio approved it; McDonald took it out.

Graeme McDonald is careful not to overplay the role of *Mackenzie* in the scheme of the autumn schedule, the overall shape of which Bill Cotton will ultimately determine. In the same week that *Mackenzie* begins its run, McDonald said, three or four series will be launched from his department. A new series will also be launched that week on BBC-2. 'The theory is that it is better to get a pattern of viewing established. If all the programmes were the same length, which they are not, it would be quite simple. They would all have to start in the same week in order not to get fouled up at the other end with Christmas. But in fact they are not. One is sixteen parts, that's *Juliet Bravo*; one is four parts, *Fair Stood the Wind for France*; *Mackenzie* is now twelve parts; *Dr Who* and a family classic will be starting. It has always been a tradition of Controllers that they like to get the impact at the start of the season. This is a thing that has dogged television in the States. I think audiences may like it, but it's something I don't know whether analysis would bear out. As people's holiday behaviour changes you could irritate people by starting something, say, in the first week of September, when in fact holiday habits are allowing people to be away then.'

At the end of July, McDonald was keeping *Mackenzie*'s place in BBC-1's autumn schedule very close to his chest. The 9.25 p.m. slot was, it seemed, relatively certain. McDonald, however, was reluctant to accord this slot pre-eminence in the evening's schedule. 'It's a powerful slot, but 8.10 is more powerful. The peak of the evening is up to 10 o'clock or 10.30 (just). From 10 to 10.30 you could see a decline if the programme is not gripping. By all the rules that we apply in placing programmes, *Mackenzie* must come after the watershed.' Furthermore, McDonald

was unwilling to pin down the 'character' of the 9.25 slot. 'It changes every day of the week. One thing that characterises it is that it follows one of the BBC's most consistent audience-pullers, the *Nine O'Clock News*, which for the last two years has been overtaking *News at Ten* to a quite remarkable degree. *News at Ten* has always had the professional plaudits, but the *Nine O'Clock News* is what the people watch. On any night of the week you can have theories: about whether people want to be richly entertained on Monday because they have got to stay in; on Tuesday whether they might be more prepared to think; Wednesday that they might be at a low ebb and need full entertainment. Thursday is roughly parallel to Tuesday. Friday you might have a situation where you have more women at home because the men have gone off to the pubs. But I'm not sure that such "patterns" bear too much examination, and they can vary from region to region.'

One opinion from within the production team that *Mackenzie*'s optimum transmission time would be 9.25 on a Thursday, because it would catch the working-class women's audience (home hairdressing night, in preparation for Friday's payday), was indirectly denied by McDonald's assertion that he did not believe the serial was specifically designed for a 'women's' audience. 'I think it may not just appeal to women, though people have said that about Andrea's work. I think if you analyse the audience, you will find that it is men who find her view of women compulsive and intimate. A particular fascination for me is that the material is already in period and it throws some of the morality which she very interestingly examines in all her work into a spotlight. Some of the things she talks about now were not openly talked about then—so that when the characters in *Mackenzie* do them, it is somehow more shocking.'

Andrea Newman characterised her contact with Graeme McDonald as 'a head round the door', and the only example of outright 'interference'—apart from Gallaccio's insistence on the cutting of sets—the BBC's veto on swearing (nudity

and bed scenes have been allowed in moderation). 'There were only a few swear words in the first place,' Andrea Newman said. 'And I was quite annoyed that some of the characters who would swear are not allowed to. I think this is unrealistic and silly. I can't understand why Diana, in labour and in a very tense situation, can't be allowed to say "piss off". "That sodding child upstairs"—also from Diana—has become "that wretched child". I haven't put up a great fight, I've just said "what a pity".'

The BBC, surprisingly, it might appear, did not stipulate in her contract a novelisation to tie in with the serial. The impetus for this came from Andrea Newman's publishers, Penguin. Co-ordination between the BBC and Penguin seems to have been minimal: publication of the novelisation (which is told from the point of view of three of the women characters and contains 'both more and less' than the serial) preceded transmission; but, as McDonald remarked, he could not recall ever having been invited to the launch of a book that tied in with one of his serials—and this despite the paperback market being finely tuned to television. 'Each publisher employs somebody whose job it is to sniff round this building among many others,' McDonald said. 'This building in particular, since our output in dramatisations is bigger than anywhere in the world.'

Like many such serials, *Mackenzie* is concerned, primarily, with the flash-points of emotional confrontation: the lies and infidelities which individuals tolerate in order to keep their spouses, lovers or mistresses; the pressures exerted on friendship by one person concealing a guilty secret from another; the usually *non*-cathartic screaming matches that are the small change of melodrama. It is significant, perhaps, that the skeletal structure of *Mackenzie* which holds these moments of confrontation together is in fact so lightly sketched. The 'fast footwork' that Andrea Newman employed readapting the narrative around the period between the property boom and the property slump, is in fact so fast as to be almost invisible. The audience is not meant to 'understand' what is going on: Mackenzie's clients are talked about but, with the exception of Diana who employs him before becoming his mistress, almost never seen. The little old lady from whom Mackenzie buys his first property in Glasgow, a sweet shop, is the only client with a human face in the first six episodes, and she is seen so briefly as to be hardly recognisable.

To be sure property matters are talked about at length, and complicated deals and financial traps quite logically worked out, but they register, finally, as merely accepted moments. The audience accepts them and the effect they have on Mackenzie and his family, in order that it may sit back and observe the next draining moment of personal crisis. 'Producers and directors like to cut, and I therefore deliberately wrote more than would fit into a 55-minute slot,' Andrea

Newman said. And much of what has been cut has consisted of the business detailing. The classlessness of the serial, and its lack of background colouring (a shot of Queen Mary's Garden, Regent's Park, and a shot of a Scottish loch, on which Jean and Jamie are seen rowing, stand out simply because of their rarity) are deliberately neutral; its conjuring of one of the great national post-war issues—property—about which everybody has heard and probably has strong feelings is deployed as a curious bait; dangled before the audience and then flicked safely and uncontroversially away.

The post-war period is summoned up with artful simplicity. Actual television images punctuate the proceedings: Kovacs sits frozen before a TV screen watching a classic piece of actuality footage of the fighting in Budapest during the Hungarian rising (for those old enough to remember the contemporary cinema newsreels, these perhaps half-forgotten scenes act on the memory with startling immediacy); later, Mackenzie visits Kovacs in hospital where he is recovering from a heart attack and issuing from the bedside TV is Richard Dimbleby's unmistakable voice describing the procession at President Kennedy's funeral (watching the sequence being edited, the serial's editor queried whether the bedside television was a post-1963 model). Perhaps most artful of all, considering the immense popularity of Patrick Moore's *Sky at Night* series, and its unassailable place in the national TV-viewing subconscious, is the clip of Moore himself—a younger, thinner and more neatly suited Moore, but unmistakable none the less—expatiating with fevered intensity on astronomical matters. These clips fix the period in terms of the medium itself far more effectively than any discussions or recreations of current events.

The early episodes were shot on location in Glasgow, London and the West Country and at Television Centre in London's Shepherd's Bush. One significance of the locations was the combination of their anonymity and their particularity. There are, for example, a number of bridging shots of the exterior of Diana's house (which Mackenzie has refurbished): taped in Egerton Crescent, off the Brompton Road, these convey a timeless, discreet notion of wealth. The terraced facade does not induce a sense of touristy wonder (it is decisively not the Royal Crescent, at Bath, or a Nash terrace on the Outer Circle).

The quality of 'anonymity' which in part characterises *Mackenzie* (and is in part a function of its relatively small budget) was notably absent from the *Bouquets*. The casting of Frank Finlay, an established name, as the troubled father in the earlier serials contributed a subliminal tremor to the effect of the subject matter. (An analogous example might be the drummed up 'shock' of the casting of Susannah York in the saga of a fictional TV serial, Robert Aldrich's lesbian melodrama *The Killing of Sister George*.) The casting of *Mackenzie* is

notable for its absence of star names: the faces are not unknown, but do not bring with them preconceived characterisations. Andrea Newman has identified her admiration for the TV version of *The Forsyte Saga* as one of the triggers that led to the writing of *Mackenzie*. Her latest serial, however, is notable—in execution—for its absence of showiness.

This is not to say that the décor and settings of *Mackenzie* are entirely 'faceless' or unreal, but simply that a notable restraint has been employed in order to minimise distractions. One location was the flat of a Bombay heiress just off Marble Arch, an extraordinarily furnished home filled with mirrors, black and white décor, and a profusion of brasswork (including two immense gleaming palm trees). This served as the top-floor flat of Krista (Linda Hayden), a German model with whom Kovacs has an affair (an affair leading, when the lift is out of order, to his heart attack), but is shown in such a way that the excesses of the décor are not in fact emphasised: we see one of the palm trees, but not the full glory of its fronds. The studio settings (at least in the first six episodes) are similarly safe: mahoganised boardrooms; velour-covered furnishings. Perhaps the only setting which registers with identifiable 'reality' is the block of flats in which Mackenzie's mother and stepfather live: the exterior of the building, which we see on several occasions, conjures in a genuine sense one of the actual effects of the property business. The building has a grim forgotten feel to it; and it is a telling reflection on the point of view of the serial as a whole that Mackenzie is anxious to move the old folk out of it and into the anonymity of his own Glasgow home where considerations of the unacceptable face of the property business seem somehow less pressing.

In conclusion, one may observe—with a degree of bafflement—the curious lack of Corporate intervention in a major entertainment serial, pared and tailored by the author and the production team to such specific ends. At the time of writing, the 'marketing' of the serial had barely begun: to be sure an article has been prepared for *Radio Times*; a number of production and portrait stills have found their way into a file at the BBC's publicity office in Cavendish Place; the publication of the novelisation is in hand; and a gramophone record of the signature tune (a single) is in preparation from the BBC itself. The notion of controlled scheduling, however, of presenting at a given time a product the response to which can accurately be gauged, does not appear—in this case—to have any basis in reality. 'We promote and publicise our programmes in our own rather British way,' McDonald said. And here perhaps we come to the heart of the matter; a TV formula may indeed be a TV formula, but how one sets about assembling and mixing, preparing and presenting the ingredients is still very much an exercise whose outcome cannot in fact be predicted. ■

'AN IMPERFECT ART'-TV SCHEDULING IN BRITAIN

What the eleven week ITV industrial dispute in autumn 1979 showed more clearly than anything else was the fragility of the 'ecology' of broadcasting in Britain. Once patterns of viewing had been disturbed, people were apparently reluctant to abandon newly acquired habits for their long-established, but temporarily interrupted, ITV viewing habits. But it was the ITV programme mix after the dispute was settled that proved to have a critical impact. Having lost eleven weeks' production, the ITV network companies were in no position to produce the schedules of programmes on which they usually rely to attract at least 50 per cent of the TV audience. As a result, the companies' climb back to their former position in the nightly ratings battle took much longer than had been expected. When ITV returned to the air in October, audiences were nine per cent lower than they had been in October 1978. In November they were 19 per cent down, in December 14 per cent. In January 1980 they were down six per cent, in February 16 per cent, and in March and April 11 per cent. The knock-on effect of the dispute was that the schedules now lacked just a few important ingredients: new programmes that had been cancelled or delayed.

The ammunition used in the ratings war is popular programming. But, as an ITV programme controller once noted, each channel has perhaps only a dozen 'bankers', programmes that are sure-fire winners. And it is the way that the schedulers play these bankers that largely determines who wins in the ratings war. Although scheduling is judged by many to be a grossly overrated art, it is in fact absolutely central to a television production. For it is the scheduler, in the end, who determines what is commissioned and what reaches the screen. Certain forms of television are encouraged, while others face considerable obstacles.

Many assumptions about the purposes of television are rooted in the reification of schedules: slots become immovable once established for any length of time, and so form the skeleton around which 'innovative' elements are cautiously shifted. The pressure to maintain ratings is formidable. The ITV companies, dependent on advertising revenue, need more than anything else to demonstrate the stability and reliability of ratings. Television advertising time tends to be bought well ahead of actual transmission dates, and inconsistency in ratings would create difficulties for ITV sales departments. The proportion of the audience that ITV seeks is at present, with one channel, just over 50 per cent. The BBC,

with two channels, has to maintain a more or less equitable audience share in order to demonstrate to Parliament that it has earned its licence fee revenue.

In the early 50s, of course, before the advent of ITV, BBC Television had the entire audience, and the assumptions of the schedulers were markedly different. The BBC's early TV schedules followed the public service traditions established for radio by the Corporation's first Director General, Lord Reith. Given a single outlet for television, the grouping of different types of programme material was necessarily a somewhat eclectic affair. But the principle that Reith established for the first one-channel radio service was that this eclecticism was to be regarded as a virtue rather than as a necessity. Serious music and music-hall comedians followed each other with scarcely a pause. Moreover, the peak evening listening times made no concessions to popular taste.

'Such men as Val Parnell, Lew Grade and George and Alfred Black... knew how to assemble a variety bill.'

Reith's philosophy was transferred virtually intact to television. Serious programmes without great popular appeal regularly appeared in the middle of the peak-time television schedules, with lighter comedy shows and sports programmes supporting them at both ends of the evening. For example, on Wednesday, 10 November 1945, the BBC's pioneer viewers were enticed to their sets by half an hour of light comedy, followed by an hour of *Scenes from the Opera* and half an hour of current affairs with Aidan Crawley. At the end of the evening came the reward: forty-five minutes of international football.

When ITV opened in 1954, the first year was testing. Some of the financial backers of the early companies withdrew, a move that they were later to regret. The financial squeeze resulted, however, in concentrating the minds of the early ITV schedulers on the needs of their advertisers: reliable ratings and a 'mass audience'. Advertisers are interested in large audiences, because they are cost effective; they are willing to pay propor-

tionately more for a larger audience, because the cost of reaching one thousand members of most main target groups (women, say, aged 16-35) is the lowest for a large audience.

The basic techniques of scheduling were developed by such men as Val Parnell, Lew Grade and George and Alfred Black. They had earned their names in the entertainment world and knew how to assemble a variety bill. Their aim was to build a television schedule that would minimise the danger of switching off. Viewers were hooked at the beginning of the evening with popular, addictive programmes like *Coronation Street* and *Emergency Ward 10*. These were followed by a new kind of programme mix. Action-adventure series, variety programmes and situation comedies were used to keep the audience tuned in to the new channel. The strategy paid off. By 1958, three years after the new scheduling tactics had been introduced, the commercial channel had won an impressive 72 per cent of the audience.

After questions were asked in Parliament by MPs worried that the BBC was not justifying its revenue from television licences, the BBC began to adopt a similar scheduling strategy. The schedules were redesigned by Donald Baverstock, Michael Peacock, Joanna Spicer and Paul Fox. They introduced soap-operas like *Compact*, situation comedies and variety shows; drama series like *Maigret*, and imported American series like the *Dick Van Dyke Show*. The ratings improved, and with the introduction of BBC-2, the Corporation was free gradually to make BBC-1 a more competitive channel. By the end of the 60s, the audience figures for the two main channels were drawing closer. Ever since, a split of around 50 per cent to ITV, 40 per cent to BBC-1 and 10 per cent to BBC-2 has been the norm.

One reason for the small variation in audience shares from one year to the next is that the basic structure of the schedules has changed little from that established in the late 60s. News programmes gradually became more appealing and, as their popularity began to justify longer slots, the slots themselves were changed. ITV's *News at Ten* represented the greatest shift in scheduling terms, moving as it did from a 9 p.m. slot, and from a ten-minute bulletin to a thirty-minute programme. In response, the BBC's main news was moved from 8.50 to 9 p.m. and increased from ten to twenty-five minutes. But, apart from these major changes, peak-time schedules have remained remarkably stable.

The kinds of programme used to build schedules in the 60s are still in place today. *No Hiding Place* was replaced by *The Sweeney*, *Minder* and, more recently, *Fox*. The programmes may change, but Mondays at 9 p.m. on ITV are forever devoted to what the ITV companies call their 'Home-produced Drama Series'. *World in Action* is still *World in Action* on Monday evenings; *This Week* became *TV Eye*, but still at 8.30 on Thursdays; and *Coronation Street* is still there on Mondays and Wednesdays, still topping the charts, and still designed to attract viewers to sit down for an evening with ITV. The BBC, too, has its fixed points in the schedules: *Panorama* on Monday evenings; *Top of the Pops* on Thursdays; the Monday film; *Tomorrow's World* and, until now, *Match of the Day*.

One reason why the schedules still look very like those of the 60s is that some of them are still being drawn up by the same men. At the BBC, it was Paul Fox who established the pattern, and he is now doing the same job for Yorkshire Television. He sits on the ITV Network Controllers' group with Bryan Cowgill, who took over the reins from Fox at the BBC. Now Cowgill is managing director of Thames Television. Both came from backgrounds in sports broadcasting, and both are recognised as being largely responsible for the increased competitiveness of BBC-1's schedule in the last ten to fifteen years. The present Controller of BBC-1 is Bill Cotton, who acknowledges that what he's doing is refining the schedule that he inherited from Bryan Cowgill.

But there are other reasons why the schedules appear so impervious to change. Television has successfully evolved few popular programme forms that can be relied on to succeed. These 'bankers' are surrounded by untried programmes or by those with less wide appeal. Soap-operas or drama serials, drama series with heavy doses of action and romance, situation comedies and light entertainment and variety programmes are the basic elements. The schedulers use several techniques to minimise the damage to the mass audiences that can be attracted by these popular programmes. The basic strategy is rooted in the concept of the 'climate of viewing'. The assumption is that audiences can be built up throughout the evening. Programmes of broad family appeal start the evening, followed by light entertainment shows, or drama serials, or situation comedies. Then come drama series, or plays, or documentaries, films and news programmes.

The art is to build towards the climax, the audience peak, little by little as the evening progresses. Peaks and troughs are to be avoided. Where low appeal programmes have to be inserted into peak-time schedules, as for instance with the current affairs *World in Action*, *Panorama* and *TV Eye*, either they are purposely placed against weak opposition (*World in Action* competes with the similar *Panorama*), or they are 'ham-

mocked'. 'Hammocking' involves placing 'bankers' both before and after a less popular programme, with the intention that a large audience hooked by the first popular programme will be happy to wait for the second, and will 'sit through' the intervening serious programme. This assumes an 'inheritance' effect: the serious programme is said to 'inherit' the audience from the first popular programme. Programmes that attract large audiences sometimes create the reverse of an inheritance effect; that is, they cause an increase in the audience well before the programme begins. This is known as a 'pre-echo' in scheduling jargon. Shows can also be placed in 'protected slots'—that is, points in the schedule where opposition is weak—in order to introduce new programmes and test viewer reaction.

Though these tactics might seem to indicate the scheduler's active role, scheduling in British television is in fact subject to many constraints that are lacking in other TV systems, notably in the United States. The untrammelled pursuit of high ratings has resulted in the almost total predominance in the US peak-time schedules of situation comedies and action-adventure series. One of the main US networks actually schedules seven consecutive situation comedies on one evening. The BBC has gone so far as to schedule three comedy shows back to back, but the outer limits of ratings hunting are as yet foreign to British television.

'The art is to build towards the climax, the audience peak, little by little as the evening progresses. Peaks and troughs are to be avoided.'

It was undoubtedly the BBC's commitment to public service broadcasting that caused the IBA in its turn closely to regulate the commercial television service; ironically, however, the Controller of BBC-1 now has much more scheduling freedom than his opposite numbers in ITV. The IBA keeps a close watch on the ITV schedules and has laid down a complex and powerful set of rules to which ITV schedulers must adhere. Overseas imports must not exceed 14 per cent, averaged over a six month period; no more than seven feature films a week may be shown, with no more than four and a half films during peak viewing time; except during holiday periods, feature films must be separated by a minimum of two hours; *News at Ten* is mandated; there have to be two hours of serious programmes a week in peak time, including one peak-time hour devoted to documentary; there must be at least one single play per week; and there must be

no more than two peak-time reward shows a week.

But perhaps the greatest handicap of the ITV scheduler is that he is only one among fourteen schedulers whose individual interests do not always coincide. The BBC's great advantage, in scheduling terms, is on the other hand its network character. ITV is a network only during peak time, and even then there are frequent regional variations. Much of the time the regional ITV companies are committed to producing local programmes, or to broadcasting their own selections of films or bought-in drama series. This means that the BBC has an advantage over ITV in the promotion of programmes. And good promotion is recognised to have a marked effect on the ratings.

The ITV schedule is produced by a committee system: the programme controllers of the five largest ITV companies (Thames, LWT, Granada, ATV and Yorkshire), a representative from the IBA and in the chair a representative of the Independent Television Companies Association (ITCA). The schedules are designed quarter by quarter, with their overall character determined at annual meetings. Once the mandated slots have been filled, and the well-established slots shared out between the Big Five, there is little room for manoeuvre.

The BBC, with its two television channels, is better placed to be more creative in its scheduling. The programmes are produced by several departments which compete for peak-time slots: characterised by one BBC channel controller as 'warring tribes', they have a fair amount of freedom in what they offer the controllers, though the latter can, and often do, 'commission' categories of programmes. BBC-1's schedule is to some extent determined by ITV's less flexible schedule. The Controller of BBC-1 can shift programmes around the schedules in order to inflict maximum damage to ITV. Being less flexible, the ITV schedules are usually unable to respond rapidly to such tactics.

The BBC began its BBC-2 service by scheduling vertically: that is, placing programmes in such a way as to maximise 'audience flow' throughout the evening. Mondays would be devoted to, say, sport, Tuesdays to music, and so on. Devised by Michael Peacock, this scheduling tactic was singularly unsuccessful, and it was dropped in favour of horizontal scheduling: that is, BBC-2's schedule was planned after BBC-1's and was designed to offer complementary programming. Generally, if sport is on BBC-1, it will not be on BBC-2 simultaneously.

Though it has been on the air for more than fifteen years, BBC-2 has never achieved average ratings of over 15 per cent. It has always suffered because it did not really begin to offer programmes of wide appeal until around 8 p.m., by which time, of course, the two main channels were into the peak of their popular programming. More recently, however, Brian Wenham, the present Controller of BBC-2, has been tinkering

with the few options open to him, and has managed to gain an overall increase in BBC-2's average audience of something like 25 per cent, mainly through the judicious placing of feature films, the opening up of the early evening times when the Open University is not broadcasting, and the practice of breaking down established patterns for narrative repeats. *Life on Earth* was shown on both Tuesdays and Sundays, for example, gaining audiences of 8 million and 4 million respectively.

The use of common junction points with BBC-1 and the practice of cross trailing between channels does much to increase audiences on BBC-2, and accounts for the very high penetration figures for that channel. Though viewers will obviously spend less time with BBC-2 than with the other channels, they do not by any means 'avoid' it; in an average week 75 per cent of the population will view some BBC-2 output.

From these well established scheduling practices and from the schedules themselves it is possible to discern the assumptions underpinning these very concrete manifestations of broadcasting philosophies and policies. The reliance on ratings as an indicator is perhaps central. Among many potential indicators of success (critical evaluation of programmes, public liking for programmes, public tendency to view programmes), the use of the evidence of the weekly share of viewing hours and of the Top 20 Chart predominates. Yet audience researchers will tell anyone who will listen that Top 20 programmes are determined more by the opposition (i.e. competing programmes on the other two channels) than by the programmes themselves. Additionally, very small shifts in viewing can markedly affect the audience shares. As the IBA Audience Research Department notes, when sets are used for 5.6 hours a day, as at present, when channel A has a 55 per cent share it enjoys 3.1 hours of attention, while channel B with a 45 per cent share has 2.5 hours. It only requires 36 minutes to be switched from channel A to channel B for the reversal of their share positions. And just eighteen minutes switched in over two and a half hours' viewing will even up the shares.

And yet the whole basis of TV scheduling still rests in the pursuit of large aggregate audiences. The concept of the 'climate for the evening', described earlier, is a corollary of the pursuit of high ratings. Mass audiences can only be built using the established and well-tried techniques which are primarily designed to minimise the risk of switching off. In that sense they reinforce passivity in the audience.

Although the very nature of television schedules is in fact responsible in part for creating this appearance of viewer passivity, the TV scheduler sees this as a primary, *a priori* characteristic of individual television viewers. 'Inheritance effects', 'hammocking', 'audience building' and 'pre-echoes' are scheduling

techniques which assume a high degree of passivity in an audience whose members are held to be incapable of programming their own entertainment, but who would rather sit through something bland and inoffensive than actively search for an alternative. There is, however, a great deal of evidence to undermine this predominant view. The schedulers themselves are the first to admit that theirs is a 'tricky skill'. The audience is said to be unpredictable. Ratings often produce surprises. 'Ours is an imperfect art,' say the schedulers, when 11 million people stay up late to watch a darts programme; when sheep dog trials and snooker produce surprisingly large audiences; or when glossy American series flop (observe the fate of *Time Express* or *Mrs Columbo*) or become a national cult (*Dallas*).

'Ours is an imperfect art,' say the schedulers, when eleven million people stay up late to watch a darts programme.'

What competitive scheduling does most effectively is reduce the range of choice open to the viewer simply by making risk-taking more difficult. The ecology of broadcasting rests as much as anything on the minimising of risk during peak time. The reliance on proven formulae and even proven programmes (*Top of the Pops* has hardly changed in fifteen years) means that it is extremely difficult to introduce major structural changes in the content of British television.

But change is on the way, and it is coming not from the schedulers, but from the audience. The audience's *real* tastes will be revealed by technological developments that will end forever that monopoly of the means of television distribution which has played such a central role in determining the nature of television broadcasting. Individual viewers will be able to watch selected programmes, *when* they want to watch them, through the use of time-shift technology (video-cassette recorders). They will also be able to view television material that they have purchased from retail outlets in the form of video-discs. Each time a potential member of the mass TV audience views a disc or views a recording, he or she becomes temporarily unavailable.

The most far-reaching changes will undoubtedly result from the twin developments of satellite distribution and cable television. The combination of direct broadcast satellites and broadband cable systems that are certain to be developed in the 80s and 90s will theoretically provide innumerable channels for television distribution. Viewers will be

able to watch on television what they really do wish to watch, rather than what they hate the least. In the United States, where cable stations are competing with the established networks, whole new areas of programming are opening up, most notably in the areas of sports and news.

In the shorter term, the opening of ITV's complementary Fourth Channel, in 1982, will certainly affect the present scheduling patterns. However, the draft schedule produced in an ITCA document* gives little hope that the new channel will produce dramatic structural changes. Like BBC-2, it will be scheduled horizontally, with emphasis on repeats and films. Indeed, the forecasts by some IBA officials that the Fourth Channel might attract up to a quarter of the audience have raised the possibility of an escalation of the ratings war. The Managing Director of BBC Television, Alasdair Milne, has declared that he would be concerned if the BBC's share of the audience fell much below 45 per cent. He would vigorously compete with ITV if that were to happen, and adds, 'We're not bad at competing.'

But any ratings battle in the next few years will represent the last efforts of a dying breed. The days of the schedule king are numbered. The art of scheduling is difficult to appreciate unless one recognises that the grouping of different types of programme material into a very scarce resource is necessarily an eclectic business, dependent on the personality of the controller, the experience of the past (manifested in ratings and other research data), the programme supply and the extent to which the scheduler can create required elements, or at least encourage their creation.

It is difficult to name any other entertainment medium in which such disparate elements as news programmes, comedy, chat shows, Hollywood films and documentaries follow one another. We are now witnessing the last few years of that curious rag-bag of ingredients which are locked together in the nightly schedules in such a way as to promote the least offence. For, in the last analysis, the art of scheduling is the art of placing programmes of wide appeal at times of the evening when the opposition is placing—for all sorts of reasons—programmes of narrow appeal. In the television of abundance of the next two decades, the most likely future for the great national networks will be in providing for fairly large numbers of people exactly those programmes of minority appeal: current affairs programmes, special interest programmes, minority interest programmes. The mass audiences will inevitably follow the satellite superstations, and local and regional programmes will come via local cable networks. The networks may be forced to seek their last refuge in that scheduler's curate's egg, quality programming. ■

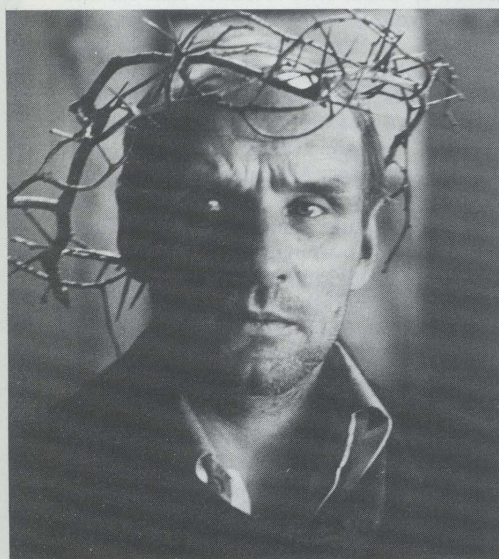
*ITV2: *The Fourth Channel*, a confidential memo from the Independent TV Companies to the IBA, dated October 1979.



TARKOVSKY'S THE STALKER

'One of the cinema's most searingly pessimistic visions,' was how Jan Dawson reporting from Cannes (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1980) described Andrei Tarkovsky's *The Stalker*, which opens at London's Academy Cinema this autumn. The stalking guide of the title sets out, once again, on a metaphysical journey into the heart of a forbidden apocalyptic wasteland where his own superstitions are challenged by the precepts of his companions, a philosopher and a scientist. The film, which picks up some themes from the director's earlier work, *Solaris* (1972) and *Mirror* (1979), will be written about at greater length in our next issue.





RUSSIAN TIDES

John Gillett reports on Soviet films at the Pesaro Festival and

PESARO'S Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema is a compact little festival famous for its national 'years', in the past taking in Italy, China and the United States. This year it featured a panorama of Soviet films of the 70s highlighted by a substantial flashback to work of the 30s. Apart from the films (some scarcely shown previously outside the USSR), Lino Micciché, the festival's ebullient director, coaxed a 20-strong Soviet delegation to 'go public' and discuss with a large audience various aspects of Soviet film affairs. The delegation included directors Nikita Mikhalkov, Josif Heifits, Alexander Mitta and Eldar Shengelaya, as well as sundry critics, officials and functionaries, some of whom deadened the early proceedings with rambling reports which worked the interpreters into the ground but hardly raised the audience's spirits. Things livened up when Mikhalkov, a splendid, rather actorish presence, ruefully commented on those graduates from VGIK 'who make their diploma films which have to be shown, then go on making bad films until they become teachers and show their pupils how to make bad films.'

Determined to get answers to the most awkward questions (although we never sorted out the delegates' views on what Soviet censorship really meant), Micciché laced the speakers' comments with some barbed rejoinders of his own, producing a memorable moment when he challenged the panel to give information, not

opinions, on two obscure directors of the 30s. When one of the delegates then outlined perfectly acceptable biographies of them, everyone felt a breakthrough had been achieved. As usual on these occasions, however, the most useful exchanges took place during subsequent unofficial discussions with the visitors.

Oblomov and King Stach

Many of the more interesting films shown were included in the NFT's Soviet Week last April, but we also saw several hitherto inaccessible examples from the Republics: nothing absolutely remarkable, perhaps, except for Maljan's *Naapet*, screened recently on BBC Television, and one or two favourite, well-known Georgian comedies. The centrepiece of this section, however, was a complete retrospective of Nikita Mikhalkov's work, ranging from his 1972 diploma-piece (a bitter Second World War anecdote, which placed him far apart from the mythical students he joked about), to his latest film, *Several Days in the Life of Oblomov*, mysteriously rejected by the Cannes selection committee.

Shot in handsome Eastman Colour (and, even more remarkably, beautifully processed), this adaptation of Goncharov's novel inhabits the same visual world of nineteenth century nostalgia as the earlier *Unfinished Piece for Mechanical Piano*, but is formally more complex and richer in its range of

characterisation. Mikhalkov wittily contrasts the worlds of Oblomov, the eternal Russian man of inaction, with his friend, the pragmatist Stolz, setting them against a densely textured background of cluttered apartments, regal mansions and tiny villages where servants sleep away the humid afternoon hours in an ecstasy of snoring and sighing. Like Renoir, Mikhalkov suggests that all men have their reasons and ends up by condemning neither of his principals. The best tribute one can pay the perpetually inventive Oleg Tabakov is to say that he is Oblomov, whether tucked in bed in his shadowy room (round which the camera prowls, probing every dusty corner), berating his servant or erupting into his fussy, bumbling rages.

Halfway through the film, the dark city interiors yield to a Renoiresque/Chekhovian discreetly distanced vision of a countryside swooning under summer heat and sudden storms. Oblomov's meeting with the rich country girl, the notable Elena Solovei from Mikhalkov's *Slave of Love*, who forsakes him for the livelier young rakes surrounding her, culminates in the film's finest moment, when Oblomov waits all night in the rain outside her house, transfixed by his newfound love and only able to return, falteringly, in the bleak morning light. Mikhalkov fuses all these sensuous elements with a splendid feeling for the original's comic implications; furthermore a voice-over narration enables him to introduce all kinds of narrative ellipses which unite childhood past and present, and lead to a final hymn to nature which

Below: Valeri Rubinchik's flamboyant 'The Wild Hunt of King Stach'.



on the Boris Barnet Retrospective at the National Film Theatre

surprises, not so much by its extremely un-English emotionalism, as by its mystical fervour and use of religious chants.

On the evidence of Pesaro's selection, some of the Soviet Republics are now embarking on strange, uncharacteristic paths. Shot in stark black and white by a zoomless camera which moves, almost imperceptibly, throughout every scene, *A Georgian Chronicle of the 19th Century* by Alexander Rechviashvili is a sinister little novella which traces the events following a young man's attempts to clarify a legal claim on an area of land. In tone, the film is rather reminiscent of Nemec's *The Party and the Guests*, with the equivalent dark-coated figures furtively moving through dust-encrusted offices or gathering for some conspiratorial conference in a forest glade. As an allegory it is not always clear, but as a visual experience it is hauntingly obsessive, culminating in a grim scene when the young man is trapped and deposited in a pit, followed by some wild trackings through the forest as a group of villagers pursue his tormentors. We never know what finally happens as the film breaks off abruptly, almost as if in mid-sentence.

It is difficult, perhaps, to envisage a Byelorussian film influenced by Whale, Fisher, Bava and Corman, but *The Wild Hunt of King Stach* by Valeri Rubinchik seems to be exactly that, down to the Poe/Corman hero who arrives at a mysterious château and is swiftly drawn into the lives of some bizarre characters, all haunted by the medieval figure of King Stach and his ravaging band of ghostly

horsemen. Rubinchik makes no bones about his borrowings—there are characters who could have been played by Barbara Steele and Ernest Thesiger—and, if it weren't for an over-generous running-time, the film would be a pretty successful pastiche. As it is, it has its share of *frissons*: a dwarf scuttles along shimmering corridors before going to bed in a doll's house; a half-nude girl is involved in a bizarre ceremony in the basement; King Stach's horsemen, rampaging through some ravishing locations, are shot in a curiously flattened perspective and are accompanied by a great pounding soundtrack. Remarkable colour and fine interior dressings give *The Wild Hunt* a more classy appearance than the Corman films, yet it finally lacks Whale's sly wit and the flamboyant surface is marred by persistent zooming in and out of faces.

Realism or Socialist Realism?

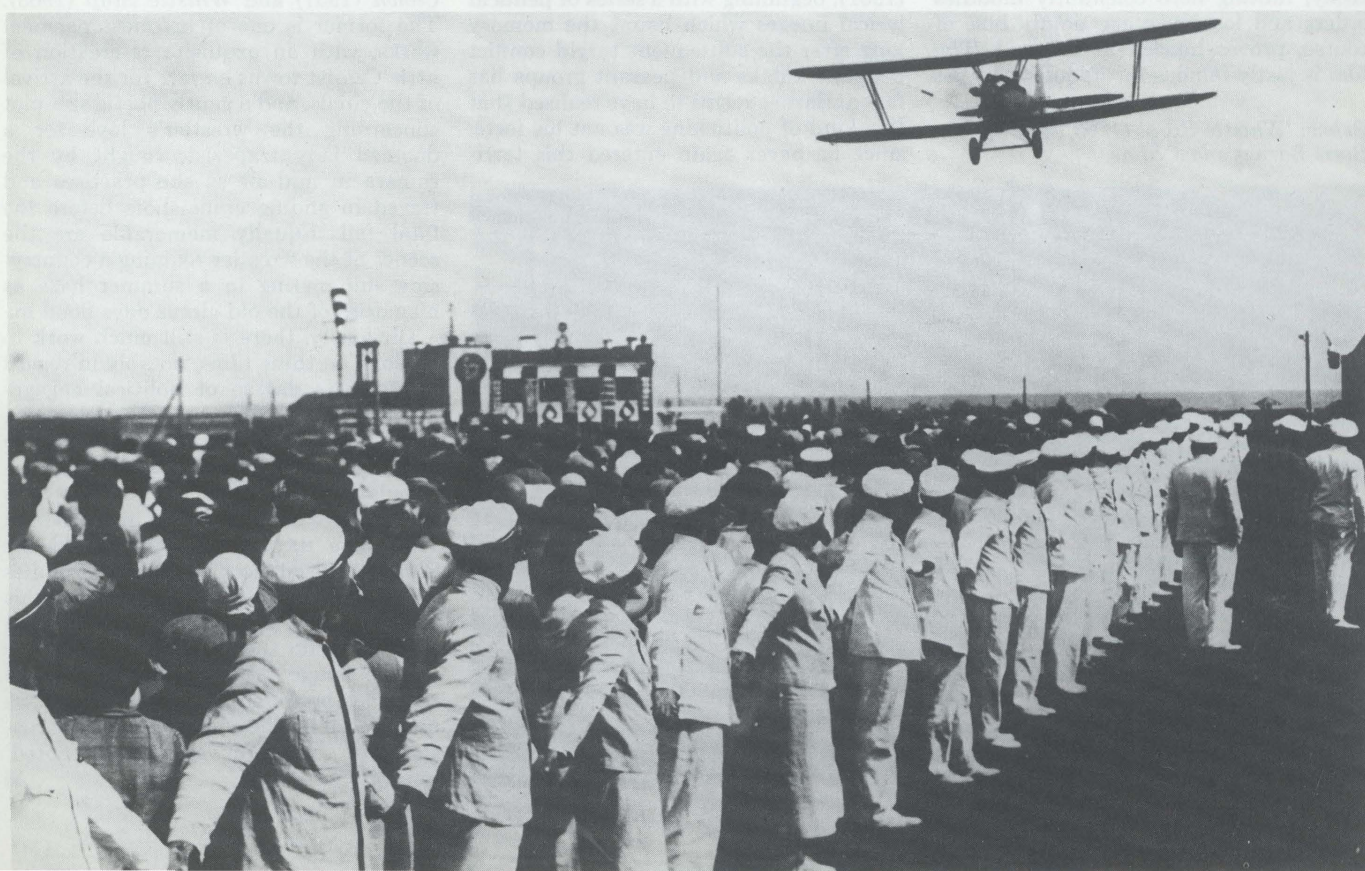
The viewing of many Soviet 30s films at Pesaro led me to speculate on why so much nonsense was written about these films by critics of the pre-war generation. Many, of course, used the Soviet cinema's 'realism' to berate the so-called escapist excesses of Hollywood; but are these products of Socialist Realism any more than fairy-tales now? On a formal level, one is struck by the crude execution of the films: tatty settings, poor interior lighting, awkward direction of players. As for characterisation, this was of course

the age of the Great Stereotypes: worker-heroes with ready smiles and loud voices who exhorted less enlightened souls with moral homilies; ugly kulaks or scar-faced White Guards instantly recognisable by their built-in sneers; bewhiskered philosophical grandfathers; and, worst of all, those giggling collective-farm girls who burst into song at the slightest provocation, as in Savchenko's *Accordion* (1934), whose desperate charmlessness is only slightly alleviated by an experimental determination to integrate music with the narrative.

There are, of course, exceptions which help to place these strictures in context. Pudovkin's much worked-over *A Simple Case* (1932) bursts from the screen with extraordinary images of war which are followed by mystical eruptions of nature conjured by fast frame-cutting techniques, and examples of reverse and forward motion which pre-echo Brakhage. After these startling formalistic flourishes, however, the film lapses into a silly triangular affair which perfectly encapsulates the problems experienced by Pudovkin, Dovzhenko, Eisenstein and Kuleshov in trying to equate the free forms of the 20s with the more didactic demands of the 30s.

I was rather taken by two oddities: *Pepo*, a 1935 Armenian production by Amo Bek-Nazarov, offers much lush imagery (the women's bathing quarters where a potential bride is looked over, a church ceremony full of gossiping heads

Below: Yuli Raizman's 'The Flyers' (1935), a celebration of Soviet airmen.



and off-centre framing), plus a gaudily attractive early score by Khatchaturian and a kind of open, theatrically pointed performance style backed up by some Germanic looming shadows. Abram Room's *A Severe Young Man* (1936) was never publicly shown in Russia, probably because of its confused ideological tone and mish-mash of styles. Looking sometimes like an offshoot of Machaty's *Erotikon* (1929) or a Nazi strength-through-joy sports film, it reaches delirious heights in an extended dream sequence—all shimmering lights and misty lenses—which seems like an *homage* to Marcel L'Herbier, of all people. It seems that Room was trying to get *something* out of his system, and one is amazed that he actually succeeded in making the film.

Then, with two films by Yuli Raizman, we were brought back to mainstream, professional film-making and into the presence of a real director. Raizman, like Boris Barnet, is essentially a narrative film-maker often influenced by American models. In *The Flyers* (1935), he virtually transforms a routine moralistic tract about a training base for pilots into a lyrical celebration of flying. Amazing, too, how he employs a Hawks-like camera style to equate movement with character; thus, the stern but kindly commander is accompanied by slow, deliberate tracking shots across the tarmac, while the headstrong young pilot is characterised by faster movements in the opposite direction, culminating in a wild, virtuoso run across the entire length of the airport.

The Last Night (1936), Raizman's best-known title from this period (co-scripted with Gabrilovich), is even richer. Against a fresco of events leading to the beginning of the Revolution, a set of disparate characters, Bolsheviks and White Guards, clash and divide on one eventful night. A revolutionary Western, in fact, with a consistently lively, mobile surface and even a touch of parody as its cocky, ranting hero constantly muddles orders and loses vantage points but, of course, proves himself at the end. The film is justly famous for its ludicrous yet

sublime tail-piece, when the old mother gallantly totters up to a huge train waiting at the deserted station and demands whether the occupants are friends or foes. Raizman is certainly a subject for further research.

A Barnet Postscript

Seeing two Boris Barnet films at Pesaro and then moving on to the NFT's Barnet Retrospective a few weeks later was like a continuation of the festival, since the Pesaro debates seemed entirely relevant to the more controversial latter part of Barnet's career. It was almost a misfortune that he started on such a high note. *Miss Mend* (co-directed with Otsep in 1926) elevates serial conventions to delirious heights, nods towards agit-prop ideals and shows how influential were Barnet's years with Kuleshov's Eccentric Workshop. *The Girl with the Hatbox* (1927), with its luminous use of snowy locations and bustling city streets, coupled with a witty triangle love story, is entirely comparable with the American comedies it lovingly caricatures. And *The House on Trubnaya Square* (1928) demonstrates an even richer feeling for film form in its extravagant visual invention, like the freeze-frame joke involving a tramcar near the beginning and the wonderful tenement set with the camera craning up and down on scenes of frenzied activity. The use of sound, especially off-screen effects, in *Outskirts* (1933) added a new dimension to Barnet's work; and, strikingly in this political period, his fondness for bizarre characterisations and swift alternations between tragic, comic and ironic moods remained intact.

With the advent of the new ideals and demands of the 30s, we find the options closing in on Barnet, as they did for several of the artists discussed above. A key film in this respect is the silent *Thaw* (1931), beginning with a series of pellucid lyrical images which haunt the memory long after the subsequent turgid conflict between kulaks and peasant groups has faded. Barnet seems to have realised that this kind of politicking was not his forte, since he never again entered this terri-

tory quite so explicitly. Some time during this period, he seems to have consciously decided to vary his style as much as possible, setting himself little formal problems which could be worked out without running counter to the outward demands of Socialist Realism.

Thus, as Ian Christie pointed out during the NFT's useful seminar, *By the Bluest of Seas* (1936) is virtually a study in symmetry, with two men desperately trying to be alone with a girl, each utilising all kinds of strategies to oust the other. (On re-seeing the film, I personally felt that some of its remembered charm had evaporated, due to a certain obviousness and flatness in the situations.) Other speakers at the seminar mentioned Barnet's fondness for cyclical construction in such films as *Bluest of Seas*, *The Old Jockey* (1940) and *The Poet* (1956), where the opening and closing episodes are either identical or closely related. Curious, too, how in *The Old Jockey* scenes like the training of the horse, which in other hands might have been emphasised, are elided in favour of subsidiary character sketches and a running gag about an accident-prone lady doctor.

Barnet's most extreme stylistic switch can be found in *Exploits of an Intelligence Agent* (1947), which seems closely influenced by American wartime models, the Germanic shadow of Lang and the convoluted plotting of Graham Greene. It is a Barnet 'entertainment', in fact, played with a nice tongue-in-cheek flourish by Pavel Kadochnikov as the gallant underground agent and featuring Barnet himself as a swaggering German general who gets his comeuppance in a whirlwind finale, not far removed from the lovable improbabilities of *Miss Mend*.

During Barnet's last period in the late 50s and early 60s, some of the pressures were off and we see him once again relishing oddball characters and playful flights of fancy in *The Wrestler and the Clown* (1957) and *Whistle Stop* (1963). The former is one of his most personal works, with an exquisite re-creation of little Czarist towns *en fête* for the arrival of the circus, and a gently poetic sub-plot concerning the wrestler's love for a doomed lady trapezist, caught by the camera in mid-air as she practises and traced in gliding crane-shots before the fatal fall. Equally memorable are the scenes of the wrestler roaming a countryside shimmering in a summer haze as memories of the old circus days flood in.

Obviously, there is still much work to be done on these films, notably in regard to Barnet's degree of political engagement, his problems with changing régimes from the 30s onwards, and the mystery surrounding the alleged unpopularity of his last few films, which is said to have contributed to his suicide in 1965. The NFT has now presented the films for discussion; perhaps the eddies which will doubtless emanate from this event may encourage other cinémathèques to do the same, and his *oeuvre* will no longer be one which slides into reference books either in footnotes or as material to fill the cracks between discussion of the universally 'accepted' innovators. ■

Below: 'Whistle Stop' (1963), one of Boris Barnet's last films.



INVISIBLE WOMEN

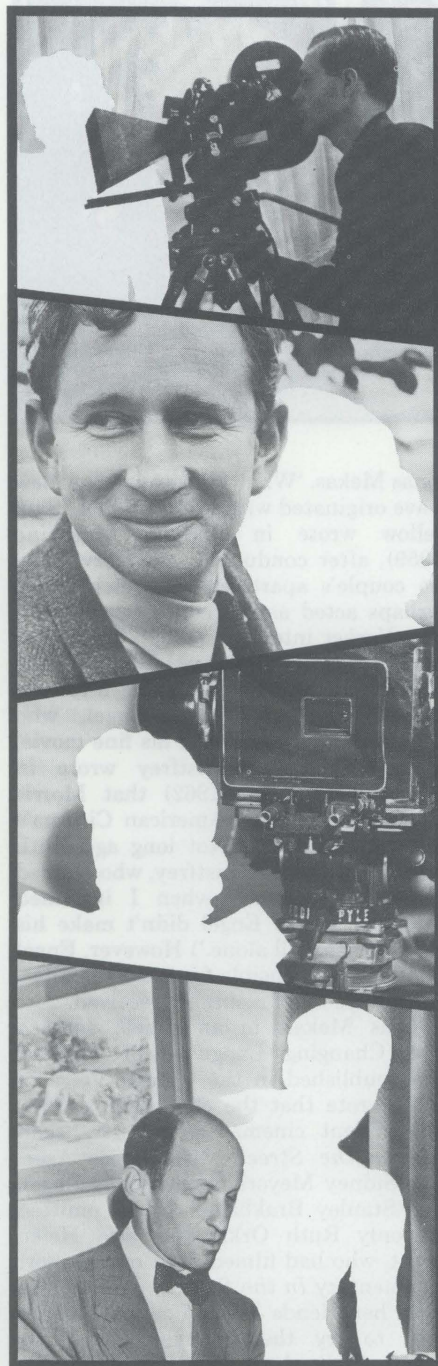
by Cecile Starr

As women today take on more and more responsibilities in the creative and business aspects of filmmaking, this serves as a reminder that the women of earlier decades who worked in these significant roles have become more and more invisible in recorded film history. Granted that women directors and producers have been few, still their rarity might have made them and their work more noticed, rather than less.

Even so successful a woman as Dorothy Arzner, who died last year in California at the age of 82, does not appear at all in Arthur Knight's *The Liveliest Art* (1959) or in David Robinson's *The History of World Cinema* (1973). She is mentioned once in Lewis Jacobs' vintage *Rise of the American Film* (1939) but only as one of the 'better known cutters'—though she had been directing movies for a dozen years before Jacobs' book was published. How did it happen that women were so often overlooked in the standard film texts, except occasionally in single sentences or footnotes (or parentheses)?

'I don't know how it happened,' the film-maker and critic Basil Wright wrote to me when I asked why women were almost entirely omitted from his otherwise admirable history of film, *The Long View* (1974). He'd noticed the omission in the galleys and 'had to make a long footnote about a number of women'—twelve in all, from Dorothy Arzner to Susan Sontag. Somewhat abashedly, Basil Wright added, 'and Dorothy Arzner is an old friend of mine.' Another woman who ended up in a footnote is Marie Epstein, who co-authored and co-directed the French classic *La Maternelle* in the early 1930s; in the book *The Art of the Motion Picture*, published in 1946, Jean Benoit-Lévy refers to her as 'my precious collaborator'. But this single mention falls as an afterthought into the chapter entitled 'The Assistant Director'. With such old friends and precious collaborators, women film-makers haven't needed enemies; they've just been conveniently overlooked.

For example, Alice Guy (later Blaché), whose career as a director-producer in France and the United States spans the first two decades of film history, rarely appears in the published histories of either country. The pre-war *History of Motion Pictures* by Bardèche and Brasillach identified her in passing as a former actress, which she was not—she started her work in films as a secretary at the Gaumont Company in Paris. A later French reference book (*Dictionnaire Illustré du Cinéma*, 1962) attributed her early spectacle *La Vie de Christ*



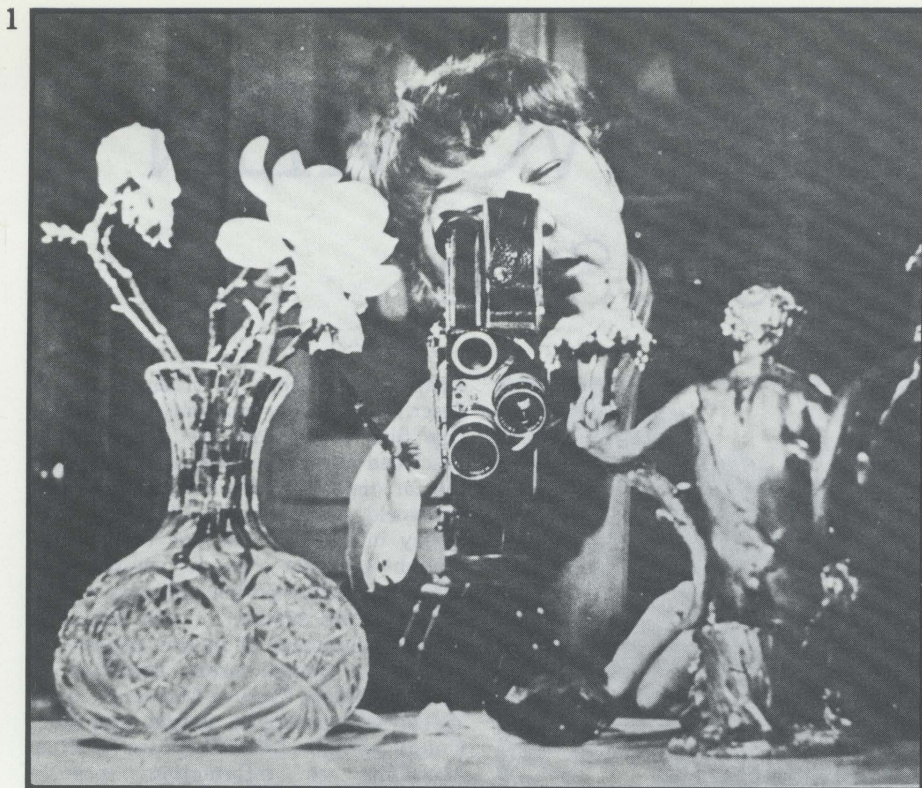
to Victorin Jasset, the man who had assisted with crowd scenes. Only when her own autobiography was published posthumously in France in the mid-1970s was it established that Alice Guy had also directed more than a hundred short films with sound-on-disc synchronisation in the years 1906–1907, many of them filmed on location at country fairs and gypsy camps in Spain and southern France. Of the several dozen longer films she made later in the US, nearly all have

disappeared except as titles and brief descriptions in her company's catalogue. One film entitled *In the Year 2000* is described as a fantasy about a time (not too far distant now) when women ruled the world. Alice Guy Blaché died in New Jersey in 1968, at the age of 95; it is thought that not a single newspaper or periodical published her obituary.

'When the history of the dramatic early development of motion pictures is written,' a woman writer predicted in 1921 in *Motion Picture Magazine*, 'Lois Weber will occupy a unique position.' Unique perhaps, but still not very visible. According to information recently unearthed, Lois Weber directed some 400 films between 1908 and 1934, many of which she also wrote. Yet she is not mentioned at all in Arthur Knight's *The Liveliest Art* (although the famous vaudeville team Weber and Fields is mentioned twice). Lewis Jacobs, in *The Rise of the American Film*, calls Lois Weber 'a leading woman director' of her time; yet elsewhere in the book he sums up her work in a single half-sentence: 'Lois Weber was notable for her birth-control propaganda films (*Hypocrites*, *Where Are My Children?*, *Idle Wives*) ...' Jacobs entirely overlooked her other movies on such subjects as child labour, capital punishment and alcohol abuse.

Women have been prominent as screenwriters since (or perhaps before) Anita Loos began working for D. W. Griffith in the pre-World War One era, but Richard Corliss included only two women among the 37 screenwriters he chose to discuss in his book *Talking Pictures* (1974). These were Betty Comden and Ruth Gordon, both of whom worked only in collaboration with male partners. In the chapter Corliss devoted to the ten films that Comden wrote with Adolph Green, she got her accustomed first billing. But poor Ruth Gordon, who co-authored story and scenario for four films with her husband Garson Kanin (Kanin wrote eight or nine others alone) virtually lost her identity in Corliss' book when she appeared 14 times in a team he referred to as 'the Kanins' and once more for good measure as 'Kanin and his wife'. Ruth Gordon's name is given only five times in the 12-page chapter about their work. In the book's Table of Contents she appears as the semi-visible member of the team called 'Garson Kanin (and Ruth Gordon)'.

Film wives have been frequent victims of many other kinds of disappearing acts. Marie Menken, who now is credited with filming most of the 1940s avant-garde classic, *Geography of the Body* (made



with her husband, the poet Willard Maas), received no screen mention for her work—although the film depended heavily on its effective photography of his and her bodies. And while much has been written about Maya Deren, the ‘mother of the American avant-garde film’, a recent trend seems to attribute much of her best film, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), to the talents of her collaborator (then her husband), Alexander Hammid. But most filmmakers choose collaborators of similar or comparable abilities; film history and responsible criticism should be able to accommodate both its Derens and its Hammids, for their diverse talents, without pitting partner against partner.

I must add that until the 1970s women’s movement focused attention on women’s creative achievements, I sometimes neglected to include my friend Claire Parker as full collaborator with her husband Alexander Alexieff on their pinboard animation films, although Alexieff’s writings and the films’ screen credits give her full recognition for her work. But a recent Italian book on animation entitled *Topolino e Poi* (by G. Bendazzi, 1977) ignores her even more baldly. A photograph in the book shows her peering over Alexieff’s shoulder; the caption reads only ‘Alexandre Alexieff’. Ruth Orkin, who received screen credit as co-director of *The Little Fugitive* and *Lovers and Lollipops* in the 1950s with her husband Morris Engel, was also rendered distinctly invisible, in a photograph illustrating Edward Fischer’s article, ‘Men Behind the Movies’ (the *National Observer*, 1964). The portrait of this adventurous young film-making couple bears this caption: ‘Mr Engel: from a small budget—art.’

Ruth Orkin has been further overlooked by a long list of distinguished writers that includes Saul Bellow, François Truffaut, Harris Dienstfrey and

Jonas Mekas. ‘What we now call the New Wave originated with Morris Engel,’ Saul Bellow wrote in *Horizon Magazine* (1959), after conducting an interview in the couple’s apartment at which Orkin perhaps acted as the coffee server. In a *New Yorker* interview (1960) Truffaut is quoted: ‘Our new wave would never have come into being if it hadn’t been for the young American Morris Engel, who showed us the way—with his fine movie, *Little Fugitive*.’ Dienstfrey wrote in *Commentary* (June 1962) that Morris Engel was the New American Cinema’s ‘foremost pioneer’. (Not long ago Ruth Orkin spoke with Dienstfrey, who seemed ‘genuinely surprised when I informed him that Morris Engel didn’t make his first two films all alone.’) However, Engel was solely responsible for two later films, which were less favourably received.

Jonas Mekas, in an article entitled ‘The Changing Language of Cinema’ (first published in the *Village Voice* in 1962) wrote that the change to a freer, independent cinema in the US ‘began with *In the Street*, with James Agee, with Sidney Meyers, with Morris Engel, with Stanley Brakhage.’ Mekas omitted not only Ruth Orkin but also Helen Levitt, who had filmed most of the short documentary *In the Street*, and had also urged her friends Janice Loeb and James Agee to try their hands behind the camera. Mekas’ all-male list of notable independent film-makers reappears in his own book of collected writings *Movie Journal* (1972), and in P. Adams Sitney’s *Visionary Cinema* (1974), and continues to be quoted and paraphrased elsewhere. Daryl Chin, in an article on Francis Lee (the *Soho Weekly News*, 1976) included Loeb and Agee in his mention of *In the Street* but inverted the credits to put Agee first and Levitt last. This is not at all uncommon, since Agee has become a cult figure in both film and literary circles. Fortunately, both Ruth Orkin



THE INVISIBLE WOMEN

1 Marie Menken, not given credit for shooting her husband’s pioneer film, *Geography of the Body*. 2 Scriptwriters Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin. 3 Ruth Orkin with co-director and husband

and Helen Levitt have been much more widely recognised for their work as still photographers.

Another successful still photographer, Erica Anderson, got screen credit for filming *Grandma Moses* in 1950, with Jerome Hill listed as director—although he was not present when the film was shot. Their later productions, including the feature-length Academy Award winner *Albert Schweitzer* (1955), credit Anderson as director and Hill as producer. You will look long and hard to find Erica Anderson mentioned in books about American documentary filmmaking, although she is said to have been the first person in the US to shoot low-budget independent art documentaries on 16mm.

Helen Grayson, the first American woman to launch a full-fledged career as a documentary director, got off to a good start in film history but ended up as another invisible woman. Her work merited a full page in *Documentary Film* (1952) by Paul Rotha and Richard Griffith, in which Griffith called her first film, *The Cumington Story*, one of the best government wartime productions. But two decades later, Richard Barsam in *The Non-Fiction Film* (1973) incorrectly



Morris Engel. 4 Helen Grayson, whose documentaries are often attributed to men, or to no one at all. 5 Susan Sontag, a footnote in Basil Wright's *The Long View*. 6 Ida Lupino—her leading ladies 'looked too much like herself'.

listed Sidney Meyers as the film's producer, editor and narrator (to my knowledge he had been only its editor)—and didn't mention Helen Grayson at all. Nor did Lewis Jacobs mention her in his listing of the film in *The Documentary Tradition* (1974).

While Esther Shub is written about in many books on Russian film as the creator of the first compilation movies—i.e. artistically new films created from old footage—her name is conspicuously missing from the major writings of Sergei Eisenstein, although it is generally agreed that Eisenstein learned from her the technical realities of montage which became the keystone of his first great films. The oversight seems to have carried over into real life, according to a recent book on Eisenstein by F. Room, who states that Shub never understood why she alone of Eisenstein's early film colleagues was not asked by him to work on his first big production, *Strike* (1924).

Women film-makers are frequently overlooked or slighted in the important collections and film programmes on which motion picture history so often is based. For example, a three-year Sunday evening series entitled 'History of Film',



at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, ended last spring after having projected some 300 hours of films from the Museum's archives, of which only some three hours were made predominantly by women. Although this series included many avant-garde films of the 1970s, the most recent women's film shown was Shirley Clarke's four-minute *Bridges-go-Round*, dating from 1958. A later four-week exhibition called 'American Independent Cinema: Recent Acquisitions' included three films made by women, in a total of over 50 titles.

The British-born writer Iris Barry, though not a film-maker, surely deserves permanent recognition in American film history as the one person who more than any other influenced research and study in film. As the Museum of Modern Art's first and most far-sighted film curator, she substantially established the framework on which its archives, circulating film library and publications are still based. Yet her name cannot be found in current film histories written by a generation of specialists schooled in the very films that Iris Barry preserved for them. The Museum itself doesn't mention her name in its current film catalogue, nor is there any visible tribute to her work in the Museum proper.* In his historical retrospective article 'MOMA and the Movies' (ARTnews, October 1979), Andrew Sarris referred to himself more than a dozen times (as 'I' or 'my'), although he had little to do with the Museum's film activities. Iris Barry's name appeared only twice.

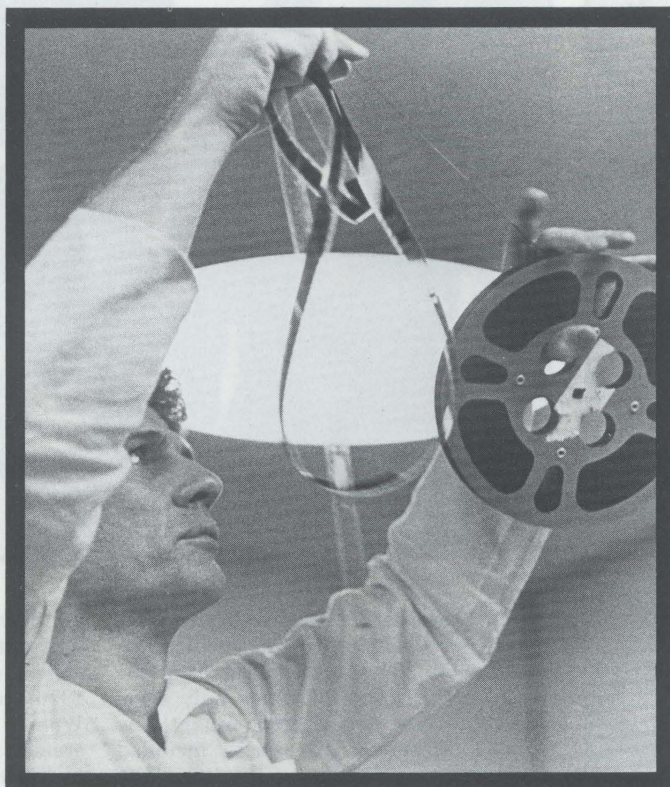
While cults have grown up round many types of motion pictures—from Westerns to musical comedies to horror movies—'women's pictures' have usually been referred to within quotation marks and have been treated with relative disdain. Films that see life from a woman's viewpoint have neither been absorbed into the mainstream of standard film history,

nor have they received special recognition outside. Sarris, for example, in an article entitled 'The Ladies Auxiliary, 1976' (published in the recent anthology *Women and the Cinema*), states his preferences for women-oriented movies made by such directors as Lubitsch, Minnelli and Sirk, over those made by Ida Lupino and Dorothy Arzner. Sarris objected to Ida Lupino as a director on the grounds that her leading ladies looked too much like herself. Arzner's 'only ideological edge' over prominent male directors of women-oriented movies 'may turn out to be the spectacular spinelessness of her male characters.' Sarris concludes, however, that Dorothy Arzner has risen 'from a mere footnote' to 'a chapter heading all her own.' Where this chapter has appeared, or will, he did not state.

No one seems to know how all this has happened, any more than Basil Wright did. Such consistent neglect seems to have been largely unintentional, if not unconscious; yet inestimable damage and hurt must have been done to the women film-makers of the past. Would Dorothy Arzner or Helen Grayson or Ruth Orkin have stopped making movies in mid-life, if they had been given the kinds of recognition their male counterparts received? With footnotes, parentheses, half-sentences, or no mention at all, many talented, hard-working women of the past have become virtually invisible in recorded film history. Does this mean that women who are now making films are already fading into oblivion, like smiling Cheshire cats, before our very eyes?

*A recent low-key tribute to Iris Barry, in connection with the Museum's 50th anniversary, was so small and unceremonious that it went unnoticed by all but a handful of her former colleagues and friends. But a handsome commemorative publication, *Remembering Iris Barry*, supplied brief tributes and recollections by eleven of them.

JAMES BLUE



So far as I can work it out, I first met James Blue on 6 February 1964. It was a few days after that same date in 1980 that he started to complain about pains. He had just completed a successful workshop at the National Film School, where he had been teaching as head of the direction department while on leave from his regular appointment as professor at SUNY/Buffalo.

The NFS workshop had taken place on the video stage at Beaconsfield. He had screened for his students Karel Reisz's *Dog Soldiers*, with one scene missing—the one in which Nick Nolte arrives at Tuesday Weld's house to deliver two kilos of heroin and finds her totally unprepared. It is a key scene in the movie. The students' task, working in five different groups, was to cast the scene and shoot it as they thought it could best be fitted into Reisz's film. On 9 February, Karel Reisz came out to Beaconsfield, analysed the five versions and then sat by, in some trepidation, while his version of the scene was run.

There then ensued a discussion with Reisz of the differences. This was videotaped by students in the group. It is the most extraordinarily concrete discussion between a director and students that I have ever witnessed. Beaconsfield students are not prone to play the tourist around visiting celebrities, but this discussion was different. They had risked what Reisz had, and the discussion was from the inside. Blue's role in it—the enabler, the provocateur, the insistent

James Blue, film-maker, teacher, writer, died at a clinic in Buffalo, New York, on 14 June after a short illness. The cause—cancer that could not be traced and thus could not be treated. He was forty-nine. Here, Colin Young, Director of the National Film School, recalls a friend and an always vital collaborator.

but friendly guide. It was typical of him that he should have been worried stiff about the exercise, for he also took risks in whatever he did, not least as a teacher.

The assignment we gave him at Beaconsfield was to demystify the job of direction. Predecessors like Paul Dickson, Jack Gold, Mamoun Hassan, Bill Douglas and Alexander Mackendrick had given us some guidelines about how this could be done, and had created an appetite in all of us to see it done. Blue never proceeded from authority, but from the built-in requirements of the film text. Everything was open to discussion, but the proof was in the shooting. When he died he was working on the relationship between *staging (mise en scène)* and *meaning* in a scene. The elements of performance (and casting), lighting and camera style were isolated and then reintegrated in his demonstra-

tions, in his analysis of existing films and in his carefully worked out exercises. His *Dog Soldiers* exercise will exist as a model for others to study and develop, and it has already become part of our standard methodology.

When I met Blue, it was by chance, as are some of the best encounters. Ernest Callenbach, editor of Berkeley's *Film Quarterly*, was due to give a lecture on American independent cinema at a University of Oregon seminar called, rather grandly, 'New Dimensions in the Arts'. He couldn't, because of illness. I went instead, and according to my diary lectured on *cinéma vérité*. I can't remember what Blue talked about, but he was a star—graduate of the drama department at Eugene, and subsequently graduate of the French film school in Paris, IDHEC, taught by Ghislain Cloquet and in the same promotion as Johan van der Keuten and Costa-Gavras. He was one of a small group of Americans who went there in the 50s attracted by what the French were then doing to cinema—among them the Hollywood cameraman Stevan Lerner, frequent collaborator with Blue on his documentaries for the United States Information Agency.

I met Blue again at a Flaherty Seminar in Brattleboro, Vermont, later that year, and quickly persuaded him on that second encounter to come and teach at UCLA, where I had just taken over the chore of being head of the film school.

Blue was a born teacher, but he was a 'made' film-maker. For a person whose finished work looks so easy, he worked at everything long and hard. He was one of a small band of people I have known and worked with who had what Arthur Ripley once called 'the muscle that senses what an audience's reaction is likely to be.' This sounds mystical, but in fact it comes from a clear understanding of film grammar, an ability to 'diagnose' a film sequence and its relationship to the ones before it and after it. Put simply, he was good at 'structuring'—both his own films and those of others, including his students, with whom he was prepared to spend whatever time was necessary to fix something that was not going together properly.

In fact he rarely stopped working. It became a joke among us—especially by the time he got to Houston, where he gathered a small band of similarly minded film-makers to help set up an experimental curriculum at Rice University. Non-film students were taught, mostly with Super 8 and half-inch video, how to make and use film. I worked there with him from the beginning, first commuting from Los Angeles and later, less frequently, from London. David and Judith MacDougall worked there, also David Hancock and Mark McCarty, all trained at UCLA and all with experience in the ethnographic programme there. Our sponsors were Jean and Dominique de Menil, who had created a museum at Rice University and who dreamt of film as a kind of friendly Trojan horse of the arts inside a top scientific institution.

In Houston, Hancock and I relaxed most evenings shooting pool. Blue came along and talked—harangued would be too strong, but it's close. Getting into and out of cars didn't stop him. While other people were saying good night he would keep making points, asking questions, worrying. When he was living with us this year in London, he had the reputation of being the only person we knew who continued a sentence in the morning that had not ended properly for him the night before. Then, maybe then, he might say good morning. But probably not. He had too many things on his mind.

He had helped set up the film school organised by the American Film Institute in Beverly Hills—creating the programme in documentary—in 1969. It was a natural appointment for George Stevens Jr. to have made, since Blue had already made some of his and some of USIA's best films for Stevens—*Letter from Colombia*, *School at Rincon Santo*, both 1962; *The March* (on Washington) in 1963-64; and *A Few Notes on Our Food Problems*, 1968. He had come to Stevens' notice with his earlier Algerian shorts and his feature *Les Oliviers de la Justice* (1962). What was obvious in these films of the 60s was his strong naturalist style, his compassion and his ability to pick his way through political minefields and come out unscathed, having honoured his subjects and the people in his films. There was also, always, a strong narrative drive in the documentaries (especially *The March* and *Food*

Problems) and a strong insistence on undramatic detail in his fiction (*Olive Trees*). He seemed to sense that contemporary fiction, to be believable, had to work through the texture of actual behaviour, while documentary, to be interesting, had to proceed through a strong dramatic structure.

This was to be an interesting element in his subsequent collaboration with David MacDougall in their Kenya films for the American Universities Field Staff, especially in the key work, *Kenya Boran* (1972). Here the assignment—'acculturation of an indigenous population through education'—was tackled as (largely) a story of two boys, one whose father sent him to school and the other whose father kept him behind, herding his cattle. There exists somewhere the record of a long discussion that Blue, MacDougall and I had some time after the shooting. It records how, in their different ways, they went about the task of preparing themselves for the project. In Blue's phrase, 'casting a documentary' was as crucial as writing a fictional character.

Blue's political dexterity could also be seen as naivety. Some saw this as dangerous—as when Kenith Trodd and Roy Battersby gave him a hard time at a Grierson seminar in Canada after he screened his three-part television special *Who Killed Fourth Ward?*. Blue made this with Ed Hugetz and Brian Huberman (who shot it on Super 8) in Houston, working through the Rice Media Center and KUHT, the city's PBS affiliate station. Blue had investigated the mysteries of town planning (or lack of it) and had seen how it permitted or caused the gradual decay of a section of the city of Houston. He used the Super 8 rushes to promote feedback within the community, and as a link between city government and the ward's tenants. The latter were provoked into taking some kind of community action on their own behalf, only to falter and step back when the confrontation came.

From the Left it was axiomatic that you did not investigate by shooting a film, but *before* shooting it. They accused Blue of misleading and even betraying his subjects. There is no doubt that this criticism hurt Blue, since he thought throughout that his own discoveries were likely to be shared by most of his audience, and that his candour in presenting his own education would be appreciated by that audience. There is little doubt that he was right. The series was enthusiastically received in Houston and elsewhere in the United States. But his role in the centre of the film, as a cross between Sam Spade and Candide, offended the more ideologically sophisticated. They could not conceive of such a consummate film-maker being so naive. But Blue was, and his innocence was a large part of what made him tick.

Blue always gave other people more credit for 'having their reasons' than, on this occasion, he was given. He was also one of the world's best interviewers. I have seen him pull out of people, myself

included, ideas and strategies they did not know were in them. He has left behind hundreds of hours of interviews, on audio and video-tape, done throughout Europe in the 60s (especially with directors who, following De Sica, made sophisticated use in their features of non-actors), and later in Los Angeles, Houston and Buffalo—all places where universities made him welcome, created space for him and let him do some of his best work.

I once took him to see Jean Renoir in Beverly Hills. He had been encouraging his students to take small tape-recorders with them everywhere, as note-takers but also to record the way people spoke, or to record incidents which he had them provoke (staging a 'drowning' on the beach, or a 'bag snatch' on the streets). As the door to Renoir's house slowly opened, I realised Blue was raising his shot-gun microphone and that his Nagra was already rolling. He had not yet met Renoir, never mind asked his permission to record this encounter. I knocked the gun mike down. Blue started with surprise. He had not been aware that he was doing it.

There was a period when he recorded everything—all his conversations became discussions, interviews. Our dinner table at home in Topanga was permanently bugged when he stayed with us. (Influence—Rouch and Morin's *Chronique d'un Été*.) He, and other visitors of his generation at UCLA—Robert Hughes, Claude Jutra, Jean-Claude Lubtchansky, Terence McCartney-Filgate—brought fresh air into the film school. Of them all, only Blue remained a teacher.

There were many unfinished projects—a script he was writing with his brother Richard and Gill Dennis, books (including one on the non-actor), edited versions of his many interviews. We shall be the poorer without them, and Richard Blue has asked some of his old colleagues to help establish a James Blue Memorial Trust to bring this material together and publish it. Like many another film-maker, he had prints of very few of his films. They will now be collected and preserved.

There were other missed opportunities. When he was a child he believed completely that on his 12th (or 14th?) birthday he would go behind the barn at his Oklahoma home, shout 'Shazzam' and he would change into Captain Marvel. The birthday arrived and he forgot. He woke at 2 a.m. that night in a cold sweat, realised his mistake and rushed out to the barn to shout the magic word. Nothing happened. For the rest of his life he wondered what might have been.

As his friend and last collaborator, Adele Santos, said, 'He didn't die on Friday the thirteenth. That would have been too tacky. He waited until the next morning.' Sadly, for us and for him, he waited on some other things too long. While in hospital in London he told me that the 50s for him had been a time of learning; in the 60s he had applied what he learned; in the 70s he had belonged to other people. The 80s were to belong to him. But they came too late. ■



Frederic Villiers on the bicycle he took to Greece in 1897. From 'Black and White', 24 April 1897.



Villiers (left, with flag) masterminded the negotiations

FREDERIC war

'Mr Villiers is a human cinematograph ...'

STEVE BOTTOMORE looks at the man who

IT IS COMMONLY assumed that the first war films (i.e., filmed records of warfare) were taken in 1899-1900 during the Boer War. The only earlier claim is that put forward by Albert E. Smith, who said that he, with his partner J. Stuart Blackton, filmed action in Cuba during the Spanish-American War in April 1898 (though this was denied by Blackton in his unpublished memoirs). But whatever the truth of Smith's account, it would appear that there was someone taking war 'newsreels' almost a year before the Spanish-American War had even started. In an article by Kenneth Gordon of Associated British Pathé in the *BKSTS* journal of August 1950 there appears the following sentence: 'The story of the late René Bull, the great war artist, building a rostrum of bamboo poles in order to film the charge of the Dervishes at the battle of Omdurman, and the *London Times* report of filming the action in Crete in 1897 by the war correspondent, F. Villiers [sic], constitute the first coverage of war news.'

Neither of these men is listed in any of the standard works on early cinema. From Gordon's information, however, it was fairly easy to find René Bull: he was a correspondent for *Black and White* magazine during the Battle of Omdurman; but, although he took many still photographs of the battle, I have found no record of his having taken ciné

pictures either there or elsewhere.* But for 'F. Villiers' the story was different. Unable to find any reference in *The Times*, I eventually located him through *Who's Who*.

It turned out that his name was in fact Frederic Villiers. He was a war artist and special correspondent for the *Illustrated London News* and the *Standard* (among other papers) in what might be called the 'golden age' of British war correspondents. In the last thirty years of the 19th century this profession was followed almost exclusively by Britons. A group of men—among them George Steevens of the *Daily Mail*, Bennet Burleigh of the *Telegraph*, Melton Prior of the *Illustrated London News* and Archibald Forbes of the *Daily News*—would regularly risk their lives to obtain up-to-the-minute reports and drawings of (mainly colonial) wars. They were undeniably brave (Prior as a shell explodes, covering him in sand: 'Never mind, I've got a jolly good sketch'), though frequently chauvinistic (Forbes on the British victory over the Zulus: 'It did one good to see the glorious old "white arm" reassert again its pristine prestige'). Of this group, Frederic Villiers was both the most

colourful and the best known. Dick Helldar, a war correspondent in Kipling's *Light that Failed*, is said to have been based on him, and Forbes-Robertson came to Villiers for advice when playing the role on stage.

By 1912, Villiers had covered more campaigns than any other correspondent and 'seen more battles than any soldier living and endured more privations.' (See F. Lauriston Bullard's *Famous War Correspondents*, 1914.) His obituary in *The Times* said: 'Although not one of the best, he was one of the most prolific and ubiquitous of the old school of war correspondents, and he always carried with him into the lecture room that air of the swashbuckler which was at one time considered the correct comportment for the soldier of the pen.' Pat Hodgson, in *The War Illustrators* (1977), is more candid, describing him as a 'poseur', contributing much to his own legend. Villiers would normally appear at his lectures in full battle-dress with his collection of medals and ribbons prominently displayed. His friend Forbes complained that in the field Villiers would go to bed wearing his spurs, believing that this 'contributed to his martial aspect'. As an artist he was only 'of moderate ability' (*The Times* obituary); he found figure drawing 'tiresome and uninteresting'. None of Villiers' war sketches was published in a magazine as it stood—it was always redrawn by a

*I now believe that this report of cinematography at Omdurman is confused with Villiers' activities there. (Bull described his still photography at the battle in *Captain*, Vol. I, April 1899, p. 66)



for the surrender of Volo. 'Black and White', 22 May 1897.

VILLIERS~ correspondent

wrote *The Times* of his autobiography.
took a film camera to Omdurman.



Port Arthur, 1904. Villiers' sketch of a Japanese cameraman with a Gaumont camera. 'Illustrated London News', 17 December 1904.

staff artist. But, despite or perhaps because of this limitation, Villiers pioneered what was to become a far more important means of reportage than the drawing.

Villiers had started as a war correspondent in 1876 for the *Graphic*. By 1897 he had covered some seven campaigns, two in the Balkan region. When Greece raided Turkey in April 1897 the region was again at war and Villiers, representing the *Standard* and *Black and White*, found himself at the port of Volo in Thessaly. Perhaps because he knew the area and anticipated only a minor war, Villiers felt that he could afford to take chances. Whatever the reason, he had included in his luggage two novel pieces of equipment: a bicycle, for the first time in a European campaign; and a cinematograph camera, for the first time in any war. ('The cinema camera was then in its infancy,' he recorded, 'so at considerable expense I took one to the front.')

He wrote: 'When this little war broke out I had ingeniously thought that cinema pictures of the fighting would delight and astonish the public.'[†] His life at the front line seems not to have been unpleasant: 'I was well-housed during the fighting in front of Volo, for the British

Consul insisted on my residing at the consulate. To me it was campaigning in luxury. From the balcony of the residence I could always see when the Turks opened fire on the Velestino plateau; then I would drive with my cinema outfit to the battlefield, taking my bicycle with me in the carriage. After I had secured a few reels of movies, if the Turks pressed too hard on our lines I would throw the camera into the vehicle and send it out of action, and, at nightfall, after the fight, I would trundle back down the hill to dinner.'

But this cosy state of affairs could not last long. Early in May, Volo was abandoned by the military. In order to save the Greek population, Villiers, with customary enterprise, suggested to the British Consul that they 'go boldly into the Moslem lines to intercede with Edham Pasha on behalf of the remaining population.' The mission succeeded and, returning to Volo, Villiers met the newly appointed Military Governor, Enver Bey, who granted him a safe conduct to Athens. Not content with this, Villiers asked the Governor: 'I want to know when and where the next fight will take place. You Turks will take the initiative, for the Greeks can now be only on the defensive.' Not surprisingly, Enver Bey was staggered by his question. Looking at Villiers steadily, he said at last: 'You are an Englishman and I can trust you. I

will tell you this: Take this steamer . . . to Athens, then get another to Lamia, the port of Domokos, and don't fail to be at the latter place by Monday noon.' Villiers arrived in Domokos 'on the exact day and hour to hear the first gun fired by the Greeks at the Moslem infantry advancing across the Pharsala plains.' On 20 May, his telegraphed report of the engagement appeared in the *Standard*.

★ ★ ★ ★

Villiers' account of his experiences is certainly dramatic, but is it true? There are several reasons why we should take his claims with a pinch of salt. First, his early autobiography published only five years after the war, though mentioning that he had a movie camera and bicycle at the front, contains none of the anecdotal material about these innovations. Second, Villiers seems to imply a scoop in being at Domokos for the hostilities. In fact he arrived with the Reuters correspondent W. K. Rose (see the latter's *With the Greeks in Thessaly*) and several other correspondents were also present. Third, Villiers was not alone in possessing a bicycle at the front—René Bull, who was also covering the war, had one, and the *Morning Post* correspondent, Wilfred Pollock, wrote a book, *War and a Wheel*, detailing what he in turn implied were his unique experiences with a bicycle during this campaign. Fourth,

[†]The Villiers quotes in this article are taken from his autobiography, *Villiers, His Five Decades of Adventure* (1920).

none of the other eight accounts of the campaign that I have examined mentions Villiers' movie camera (though, to be fair, most do not mention Villiers himself either). The only contemporary corroborating evidence is Villiers' entry in *Who's Who*, which, from the 1899 edition onwards, states that he 'used the cinematograph camera for the first time in history of campaigning during the war.'

So was Frederic Villiers the first war cinematographer? He undoubtedly exaggerated parts of his account, but would he actually have invented basic pieces of information? Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing with certainty. The written sources reveal nothing, and I have failed to trace Villiers' descendants. There is, however, confirmation of Villiers' account of filming at the Battle of Omdurman in 1898. And if he is telling the truth about one campaign, why should he falsify details of another?

But whatever one's doubts on the matter, there is no denying the fascination of the next part of Villiers' account:

'It was a laborious business in those early days to arrange the spools and change the films; and I sweated a good deal at the work, but managed to get touches of real warfare. It was a great disappointment, therefore, to discover that these films were of no value in the movie market, for when I returned to England, a friend, generally of ordinary intelligence, said to me: "My dear Villiers, I saw some wonderful pictures of the Greek war last night."

'By his description I knew they were certainly not mine. I wondered at this, because my camera was the only one to pass the Greek customs during the campaign. Then he described one of the pictures: "Three Albanians came along a very white dusty road toward a cottage on the right of the screen. As they neared it they opened fire; you could see the bullets strike the stucco of the building. Then one of the Turks with the butt end of his rifle smashed in the door of the cottage, entered and brought out a lovely Athenian maid in his arms ... Presently an old man, evidently the girl's father, rushed out of the house to her rescue, when the second Albanian whipped out his Yataghan from his belt and cut the old gentleman's head off." Here my friend grew enthusiastic. "There was the head," said he, "rolling in the foreground of the picture. Nothing could be more positive than that."

Villiers added that the film had been made by 'a famous firm outside Paris ... and since then many others of a similar nature have delighted the movie "fan".'

There seems little doubt that the 'famous firm' was that of Georges Méliès. He had been making films since 1896 and his studio was in Montreuil-sous-Bois, an eastern suburb of Paris. But even if Villiers had not given the firm's location, the film's subject would immediately have revealed its author. As Paul Hammond has noted in *Marvellous Méliès*, decapitation was a recurrent theme in Méliès' work (and in the stage acts of various magicians before him). At least a dozen of his films involve heads being severed from bodies, and many more are

concerned with other kinds of maiming.

On 22 March 1897, Méliès moved into his new Montreuil studio, where he believed he would 'rendez-vous avec mon destin'. In *Méliès l'Enchanteur*, his granddaughter, M. Malthête-Méliès, writes: 'C'est en tout cas, pour le moment, le rendez-vous de l'Histoire car Méliès a l'idée de reconstituer en studio les faits saillants de l'actualité. La guerre gréco-turque ayant éclaté au mois de février 1897 et continuant avec rage, Méliès en reproduit les épisodes les plus sanglants.'

These 'bloody events' were among the first reconstructed scenes ever filmed. They were, with their Star Catalogue numbers: 103/104: *Episodes de guerre*; 105: *Les Dernières Cartouches*; 106: *Prise de Tournavos par les troupes du Sultan*; 107: *L'Execution d'un espion*; 108: *Les Massacres de la population Crétoise*; 110: *Combat naval en Grèce*. Of these, 105 is a reconstruction of the famous events at Bazeille in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. 103/104 is also known as *La Défense de Bazeille*, and—despite what Sadoul and, more recently, Paul Hammond suggest—is clearly also to do with the war of 1870 and not the Greco-Turkish War. A detailed description of the remaining films (106-110) is contained in an advertisement of an early film distributor, Philipp Wolff, in the *Magic Lantern Journal Annual 1897-8*: '18. Mohammedan inhabitants of Crete massacring Christian Greeks; 19. Turks attacking a house defended by Greeks (Turnavos); 20. The Greek man of war "George" shelling the fort of Previsa; 21. Execution of a Greek spy at Pharsala.' The descriptions closely match 106-110, and it seems clear that it was film number 19 (or 106) that roused the enthusiasm of Villiers' friend. In *The American Newsreel*, Raymond Fielding has written that 'apparently there was not a single

major film producer in the period 1894-1900 that did not fake news films as a matter of common practice.' He divides the fakes into categories: Méliès' being among those 'not intended or likely to fool people'.

But Villiers' friend was certainly fooled. Villiers attempted to disillusion him by describing how a movie camera was operated:

'You have to fix it on a tripod ... and get everything in focus before you can take a picture. Then you have to turn the handle in a deliberate, coffee-mill sort of way, with no hurry or excitement. It's not a bit like a snapshot, press-the-button pocket Kodak. Now just think of that scene you have so vividly described to me. Imagine the man who was coffee-milling saying, in a persuasive way, "Now Mr. Albanian, before you take the old gent's head off come a little nearer; yes but a little more to the left please. Thank you. Now then, look as savage as you can and cut away." Or "You, No. 2 Albanian, make that hussy lower her chin a bit and keep her kicking as ladylike as possible." Wru-ru-ru-ru!'

Villiers here neatly sums up the problems of obtaining 'dramatic' film of real warfare. (It was a problem that D. W. Griffith was to face while making *Hearts of the World* during the First World War—eventually, he abandoned most of the footage he had shot at the front and faked it on Salisbury Plain.)

Villiers' films were on a subject that was headline news and yet he found them unsaleable. The public wanted action, not truth. Méliès was eager to supply such action, the Greek war fakes being the first films produced in his new studio. In the light of the subsequent dominance of studio production, it is interesting that these films should have scored such a notable victory over (Villiers') undis-



Omdurman: the drawing Villiers did on the 'Melik' just after his tripod was knocked over. 'Illustrated London News', 24 September 1898.

turbed reality at such an early stage in cinema history. As Villiers ruefully observed: 'Barnum and Bailey, those wonderful American showmen, correctly averred that the public like to be fooled.'

★ ★ ★ ★

In 1898, the intrepid Villiers was again in action, when he joined Kitchener's march to Omdurman as correspondent for the *Globe* and the *Illustrated London News*. He was not new to the Nile region, having been there twice before as a correspondent in the 1880s, and had clearly grown fond of the area, describing it as a 'happy hunting ground for the war correspondent', a somewhat inappropriate description considering that no less than seven correspondents were killed during these campaigns. At the Battle of Omdurman alone, one was killed and two were wounded.

But it was not in Villiers' nature to be worried by such details. As in the Greco-Turkish War, he was again experimenting with novel campaign equipment: his tent was 'a new idea for the desert, a glorified umbrella that could be put up in less than five minutes by tugging at a cord'; and again he had his bicycle (according to a fellow-correspondent, E. N. Bennett of the *Westminster Gazette*, this 'dull green' machine was not very well suited to desert conditions and as a result 'was usually to be found in the charge of his servant'). Despite his setbacks in the Greek war, Villiers had again decided to take a ciné-camera: 'I thought that in this case I might get some of the real stuff before the fakers set to work, because it would be hard for them to vamp up the local colour of the desert, dervish costumes, and so forth.'

Villiers kept the camera secret from his colleagues since he wished to be 'first in the field'. Unfortunately, the sheer size of the apparatus gave his secret away.

When some of Villiers' fellow-correspondents learned of this remarkable device they all 'wanted to take movies as well'. Villiers continues: 'Why they imagined they could get the necessary camera and spools simply by wiring to Cairo, as one would for a packet of tea, I have no idea; but anyway, the whole thing caused no little excitement in our mess. The two who were going to upset my little plans would occasionally look at me with a kind of pity for the "beat" they were making. Presently their box arrived, and the look of triumph quickly died out of their faces when they found that instead of a camera it contained a lantern projector and quite an amusing series of films of a racy terpsichorean nature to please an Egyptian audience.'

By the end of August, the Anglo-Egyptian Army had reached Omdurman and it became clear that the showdown with the Khalifa's forces would take place here. On the night before the battle, Villiers—suffering the after-effects of a scorpion sting—slept fitfully: 'Shortly before dawn I woke up, remembering that I had forgotten to fix up my cinematograph camera with films, and there might be a chance to get some action in the coming fight.' But the moon was out, and 'Charging the camera could only be done where darkness reigned; so I aroused my servant, got the apparatus together, and took it down to the gunboat the "Melik", where I found darkness enough for the purpose in her stifling forehold.'

He was there for a while ('the films for movies were difficult to fix in a hurry in those days'), and by the time the camera was loaded dawn had broken. Suddenly the boat began to move. They had received sailing orders and it was now

*From Villiers' report written 3 September 1898 and published in the *Globe* on 26 September.

too late for Villiers to go ashore. 'This was annoying but Gordon [Major Stavely Gordon, captain of the 'Melik' and nephew of Gordon of Khartoum] told me I could erect my tripod in the aft battery, which had been put out of action the previous day . . . I thought it was a good idea, for I had a level platform and a wonderful coign of vantage.'

The boat took up its position and prepared to give supporting fire to the right flank of Kitchener's army. Villiers hurriedly set the camera on its tripod, ready to start cranking. The scene was everything a cameraman could ask for: 'The Dervishes were now streaming toward us in great force—about ten thousand spearmen—just as I wanted them, in the face of the early sun and in the face of my camera.' But fate, alas, was against him: 'I had just commenced to grind the coffee pot when our fore battery opened fire. The effect on my apparatus was instantaneous and astounding. The gunboat had arrived on the Nile in sections and had evidently been fixed up for fighting in a hurry, for with the blast of her guns the deck planks opened up and snapped together, and down went my tripod. The door of the camera flew open and my films were exposed. However, I had no time to weep over spilt milk, for the fighting had commenced. I pulled out my sketchbook, and my only comfort was that from my vantage point I saw many things I should have missed ashore and that no camera of my kind could have registered.'

As with his experiences in Greece, the question again arises of Villiers' credibility. It might seem suspicious that his camera should overturn so 'conveniently'. Writing of another war of 1898, that between Spain and America, Terry Ramsaye describes in *A Million and One Nights* old-timers 'telling tales of photographic desperation and film-making



Bennet Burleigh, René Bull, Villiers, Hamilton Welldon in front of Villiers' 'umbrella tent'. 'Black and White'.

amid the shock of clashing battle lines and bursting shrapnel. But all these tales end with, "And then a big shell came along and blew up my camera and I never got back with any of the film." But descriptions by early cameramen of such misfortunes occur too frequently to be mere excuses. (Kevin Brownlow quotes several cases in *The War, the West and the Wilderness*: Jessica Borthwick, Tracy Mathewson and Urban's Britain Prepared cameramen.) Further evidence of Villiers' veracity is to be found in his contemporaneous reports in the *Globe*, reports which tally closely with the account of the battle in his autobiography written over twenty years later. (On the night after the battle, Villiers remained on the 'Melik' and, he reported with telling exactitude, the *Globe*, 4 October 1898, 'my bed was the platform of the fore battery, and my camera my pillow'.)

On page 174 of the *Optical Magic Lantern Journal* for December 1898 there appears the following paragraph titled 'A New Military Cinematographic Picture': 'When at the offices of Mr Philipp Wolff, of 9, Southampton Street, W.C., a few days ago, Mr Hessberg, the manager, informed us that they were about to publish a remarkable cinematographic picture taken in the Sudan by a well-known war correspondent. We give, with permission, an extract from an explanatory letter written to Mr Wolff: "The cinematograph film which you have was taken by me on the battlefield of Omdurman the day before the battle. It is the only genuine Sudan film as nobody else had a cinematograph with them. There was a rumour that the Dervishes were advancing to attack us, and all the men were told to lie down and be in readiness to fall in for anything. I therefore fixed my camera on the Grenadier Guards (Queen's Company) and when the brigade trumpeter, whom you see in the photograph, sounded the call, I took the men standing up, fixing bayonets, and marching off..." Mr Wolff is to be congratulated on having the publicity of this valuable film.'

It might seem that this 'explanatory letter' was from Villiers. However, the following appears in *Chambers Journal* for 1900 in an article about George Albert Smith, the film pioneer: '... Mr Smith has a copy of one real battle-picture which he developed—the earliest one, he believes, in existence ... The original film is the property of Mr Bennett-Stanford [sic], the war correspondent, by whom it was taken, and it represents a portion of the English army springing from bivouac, forming up, and running forward to join in the annihilating of the Dervishes at Omdurman.' The film sounds very much like the one described above. But whether or not it was, Villiers' claims to exclusivity must again be challenged: he was not the only person with a ciné-camera at the Battle of Omdurman.*

Like many other correspondents in the Sudan, Stanford does not seem to have believed that his role was that of a mere observer. In *The Khartoum Campaign 1898*, Bennet Burleigh relates: 'Mr Ben-

nett Stanford [sic], who was splendidly mounted, with a cocked four-barrelled Lancaster pistol aimed deliberately at the Dervish, who turned towards him. Waiting till the jibbah-clad warrior was but a score of paces or so off, Mr Stanford fired, and appeared to miss ... for the Dervish without halt rushed at him, whereupon he easily avoided him, riding off.' Burleigh himself eventually killed the Dervish. Burleigh mentions that Stanford was 'formerly with the Royals'—from contemporary Army Lists I can add that his full name was John M. Bennett-Stanford. From 1892 he was a lieutenant in the prestigious Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry. In March 1897, he joined the First Dragoons as a reserve lieutenant—hence he was free the following year to act as a war correspondent at Omdurman.

In an interview with Rachael Low, G. A. Smith said that Stanford was a wealthy amateur (from Brighton, as was Smith) who 'took up cinematography as a hobby', and sent back the first film of the Boer War. In his *Chambers Journal* interview, Smith describes a film taken by Stanford while under heavy fire: 'That film ... was manifestly left off in a hurry. It looks as though he had snatched up his machine and run for it.' Stanford was eventually wounded while filming action in the Boer War.

W. K. L. Dickson, Edison's former assistant, was also present as a cameraman during the Boer War, shooting on an early form of 70mm film. On the ship to South Africa he met young Winston Churchill, who had also been the *Morning Post* correspondent at Omdurman. Like *The Times* representative (who was killed) he took part in the famous Charge of the 21st Lancers. Villiers wrote that he had always 'envied that intrepid young officer, Mr Churchill, who ... received his baptism of fire that day.' Churchill was known in later life as a fervent cinema fan. To judge from his description of the battle, films were already a preoccupation. 'The whole scene flickered exactly like a cinematograph picture, and besides I remember no sound. The event seemed to pass in absolute silence' (*The River War*, 1899). Considering the short time that it had been in existence, the level of interest in cinematography among the correspondents at Omdurman does seem truly extraordinary.



In 1902, Villiers was married to Louise Bohne and they moved into a small mill house in Hampshire. But domesticity could not change such an adventurous nature and in 1904-5 Villiers again saw action as a war correspondent, reporting on the Russo-Japanese hostilities and specifically the siege of Port Arthur. Though he did not have a ciné-camera with him, there was a cinematographer present.

This was Joseph Rosenthal, who had obtained much of the action footage of the Boer War on behalf of the Warwick Trading Company, and was perhaps the most famous of early news cameramen. At Port Arthur, he was again working

for the Warwick Company. (Villiers wrongly states that it was the Bioscope Company.) In Villiers' account of the events there, he (somewhat patronisingly) describes Rosenthal doing the catering for the other correspondents, who apparently called him 'Rosy'. 'He has the gentleness of the fairer sex, unless some outsider steps into the focus of his bioscope when he is churning out films; then his language belies the sobriquet.' The name seems to have stuck, for some years later Rosenthal started an enterprise named 'The Rosie Film Company'. The films he obtained at Port Arthur were shown in England in April 1905 and are said to have been 'the most spectacular series of war films so far seen'. (Rosenthal had managed to get close in to the fighting thanks to the bullet-proof shield he had for his camera.)

Villiers' next reference to his cinematographic activities concerns his work in the Balkans in 1912. It was in this area that he had first experimented with a ciné-camera in 1897, and perhaps it was his failure then that prompted him to take a movie camera again fifteen years later. This time he was with the Bulgarian Army. The Bulgarians were allied to the Greeks and Serbians, the common enemy being the Turks. Villiers writes: 'The Bulgarians sent word to the correspondents assembled at Mustapha Pasha that the execution of two Turkish spies was to take place the following morning. Execution of spies is always brutal and not particularly a happy subject for illustration, and I thought I would not go. But my servant told me that all the other correspondents intended to be there, and then I felt bound to show up, as I was for the moment directing a moving picture operation called "Kinemacolor".'

Villiers made his way to the place of execution (an orchard) and there: '... found the two spies being harangued by a Bulgarian officer who was reciting their appalling deed to them while they stood bound by the wrists under the shade of some fruit trees, over the stout branches of which were slung two ominous-looking ropes ... Then followed a scene that was indescribably disgraceful. The cameramen—and there were legions—crawled up the trees, mounted the roof of the barn, and occupied every coign of vantage. Bulgarian children, dressed in gala attire and accompanied by their fathers and mothers, crowded up to the gallows trees to gloat over the misery of those wretched men. I became so nauseated with the disgusting sight that I closed down my machine and fled.'

In the *Kinemacolor Supplement* to the

*The *Era*, 17 September 1898, advertised film of 'a Charge of Lancers'. In the *Optical Magic Lantern Journal* (October 1898, p. 143), a distributor, Fuerst Brothers, advertises film of 'the Charge of the 21st Hussars (now the 21st Lancers)'. An early exhibitor, Albany Ward, mentions scenes of fighting in the Greco-Turkish War and at the Battle of Omdurman (*History of the British Film*, Vol 1). According to the *Chambers Journal* article on G. A. Smith, these films were not genuine. 'As soon ... as there was a demand for the Charge of the 21st Lancers at Omdurman, pictures were forthcoming which had been taken at Aldershot a year or two before.'

Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly (14 November 1912) appears a report headed 'War in the Balkans'. Speaking of 'the Kinemacolor staff distributed at various strategic points in the Balkans', it continues: 'Mr Charles Urban, the head of the Kinemacolor organisation, has been fortunate in obtaining the services of Mr Frederick [sic] Villiers, the famous war artist, who is now directing the efforts of Kinemacolor operators at the front.' In Villiers' autobiography, he had described what happened after he fled from the execution: 'Within ten minutes after this wretched experience I was called to the bridge over the Maritza to see King Ferdinand, who had just arrived ...'

In his description of their conversation which follows, Villiers does not mention filming the King, but apparently he did according to the *Kine* report, which both confirms and adds to Villiers' version: 'While King Ferdinand was in Adrianople a few days ago, His Majesty alighted at the bridge near the church to examine the spot where the Turks made an attempt to destroy the bridge in their retreat. Mr Villiers asked the King's permission to make a Kinemacolor record of the incident and the request was immediately granted, an excellent and lifelike portrait of this important figure in the great struggle being obtained.' In the catalogue for a 1916 private exhibition of Kinemacolor there appears, with other records of the Bulgarian forces, a film entitled *Ferdinand the Former King of Bulgaria*.†

Villiers' final venture with a movie camera was during the First World War. His and most of the correspondents' complaints at this time were not to do with the war itself but rather with officialdom. Censorship of war reporting had of course taken place before 1914—war artists had been arrested as early as the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Villiers himself had met the problem at Omdurman where, for the first time in a British campaign, all dispatches and drawings had to go through a military censor. He considered this a minor inconvenience at the time, but in the early years of the twentieth century censorship by the military was to increase dramatically.

The culmination came during the First World War when correspondents and cameramen were actually being banned from the front. Villiers wrote bitterly: 'At times I resented being so scurvily treated by my own folk, when through forty years of British warfare I had been *persona grata* with generals like Wolseley, Roberts, Methuen, Browne and Buller [significantly Kitchener of Omdurman is not on the list]. Time and again during the early years of the war I called at the War Office in London to ask for an explanation of this extraordinary fiat against the artists, but with a shrug the officials told me there was no explanation. The only reason I could find to

account for the silly restriction was that the War Office itself was trying to make a corner in the pictures, for it eventually produced some wonderful films ... The powers at the War Office were so sour with their own countrymen of the "fourth estate" that even after the ban was raised and we were allowed to go to the front, I have seen Englishmen sent back by the escorting officer while foreign representatives of the press were given extended time in the war zone ... Everything that could be done to annoy, irritate and delay English correspondents in the execution of their duty in the early days of the campaign was done by the War Office officials.'



Villiers at the front in 1915, having mud scraped from his boots. *Illustrated London News*, 20 March 1915.

Villiers did get to the front eventually (without permission) and thereafter regularly sent back drawings to the *Illustrated London News*, some of which were scoops. But it must have been hard for a man of sixty-five to be continually dodging the military police, and it came as a relief when he was invited by the French to act as war correspondent with their forces.

By the beginning of the First World War, except for Villiers all the famous war correspondents—Forbes, Steevens, Prior—were dead. And by the end of the war, Villiers had become something of an anachronism. Sir Philip Gibbs wrote: 'When Frederic Villiers began his career it was a different way of life. War was always terrible, but not so mechanical as this last war and the correspondent was a more romantic figure, more dependent on his own resources, initiative, daring, imagination and audacity ... It was a sporting life and a hard one.'

After the war, Villiers spent most of his time lecturing, writing and travelling to see the 'great wonders of the world'—one of these he considered to be Hollywood. While there he met Chaplin whom

he described as 'a daintily well-groomed slender figure of a man'.

★ ★ ★ ★

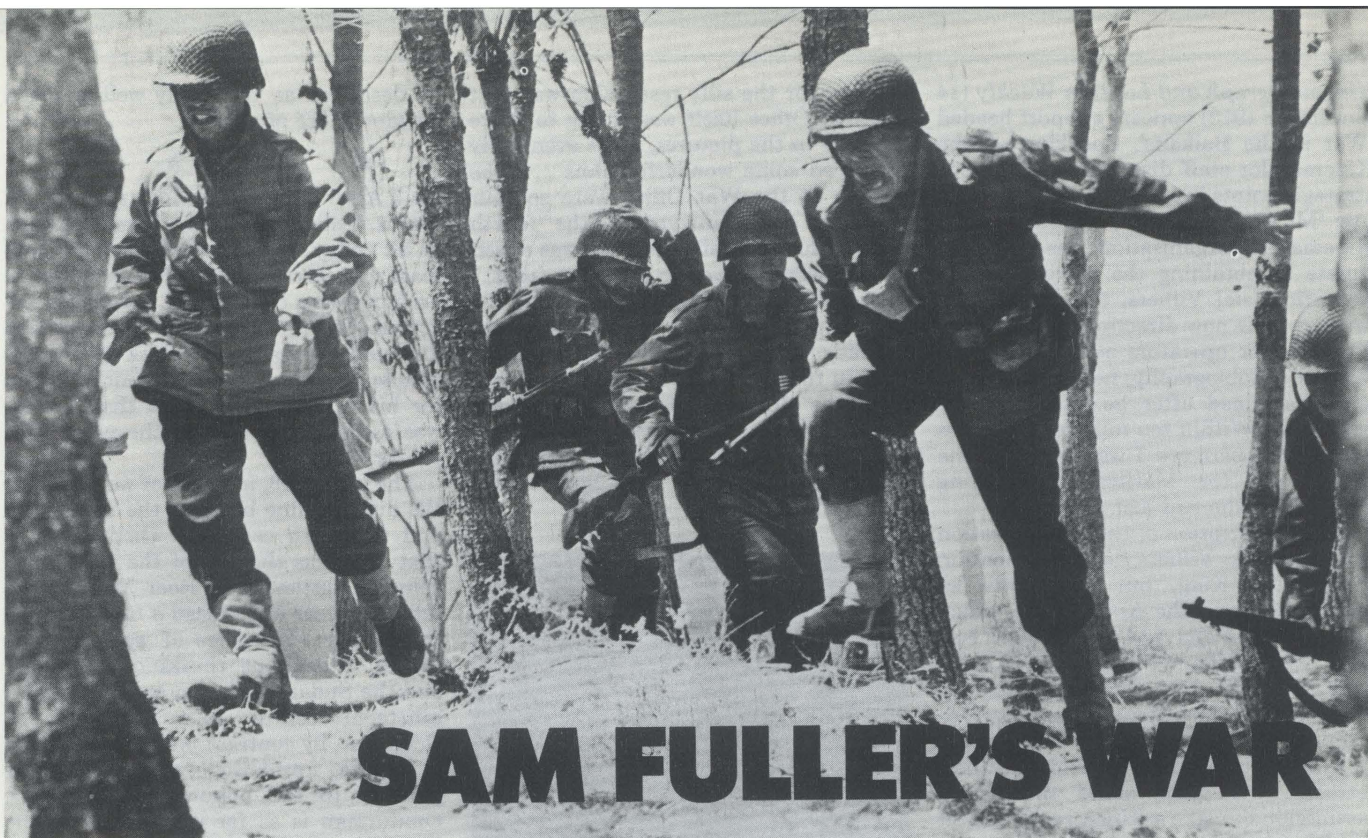
On 3 April 1922, after a long and painful illness, Villiers died. If he is remembered at all today, it is as an adventurer and magazine correspondent. His activities as an innovating cameraman have been forgotten. And this is only partly due to bad luck and the consequent lack of tangible results in his ventures. The main reason for his eclipse, perhaps, is that Villiers was essentially a man of the nineteenth century.

The year 1898, in terms of warfare, was the dividing line between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Omdurman in that year was the last of the traditional colonial battles. The Boer War in the following year introduced a new factor to the British experience of war, guerrilla tactics. When one thinks of Kitchener and the Sudan campaign one thinks of a nineteenth century colonial conflict; the Boer War, by contrast, was the prototype of the less formalised twentieth century pattern. In the popular consciousness, Omdurman is as far removed from the Boer War as the war artist's drawing is from the cinema newsreel. How much easier it is to think of this change in the character of warfare coinciding with a change in the means of reporting it. How much more simple to imagine a youthful cameraman surreptitiously filming guerrilla soldiers than a middle-aged character out of Kipling cranking away at 'Tommy Atkins' and 'Fuzzy Wuzzy' with General Gordon's nephew beside him and the sun that never sets over his shoulder. (In the case of the United States a change in the character of warfare did coincide with the first alleged filming of it: the Spanish-American War was the United States' first colonial military intervention.)

But events do not always fit into such neat conceptual pigeonholes. In this case military history and media history are 'out of sync' by two years. Frederic Villiers is forgotten because he was simply before his time. Villiers met many of the early news cameramen and worked for Urban, one of the best-known pioneers of British cinema. In the light of these connections, it might still be thought strange that Villiers' contribution to cinema history has not been recorded. In reply, I can only reiterate what so many people have said before—that the early days of cinema are shamefully poor in documentation. Indeed Villiers' case might be taken as a symptom of this poverty—a man who was a legend in his lifetime, the most famous war correspondent of them all, who was taking war film before anyone else and still filming nearly twenty years later—yet today this man is not mentioned in a single film textbook. ■

I am indebted to Patrick Hickman-Robertson for giving me the initial quotation on Villiers, and to Kevin Brownlow for his encouragement and help. Thanks also to the staff of the National Army Museum and the Film Institute.

†The information on Kinemacolor comes from the Urban files at the Science Museum. (Incidentally, Kenneth Gordon, the early newsreel cameraman through whom I traced Villiers, was also in the Balkans at this time; it seems likely that it was here he heard of Villiers' film exploits in 1897-98.)



SAM FULLER'S WAR

Take two extremes from adjacent sequences in Samuel Fuller's *Merrill's Marauders* (1961). First: during the American guerrilla attack on the Shad-zup railhead in Burma during World War II, the fighting comes to a nightmare climax in a maze of tall concrete blocks, with anonymous figures blindly scurrying and dodging, uncertain from which direction the bullet will come or round which corner a bayonet may jab. A final shot angles down on the alleyways winding between the blocks, revealing a litter of corpses, Japanese and American, scattered like a pack of cards casually tossed away by an Olympian hand.

Second: as the survivors lie overcome by battle fatigue, a small boy wonderingly touches the beard of a sergeant (Claude Akins) who half opens one eye, winks, and as the child is encouraged to ruffle the beard, closes it again. Edging quietly alongside, an elderly peasant woman begins to feed the exhausted sergeant, who suddenly becomes aware of her presence and clumsily bares his head, unable to restrain the tears that trickle down his cheeks.

Much of the problem with Fuller, as far as uncommitted criticism is concerned—though not for the average audience, quick to respond to the tabloid journalist—has been this question of extremes. Given a sympathetic awareness of the film-maker's recurring preoccupations, it is not difficult to absorb both sequences as yet another illustration of his running argument that multi-racial America is fighting to achieve unity, both within itself and against those (Communists, Fascists) who seek to foster breaches within a world where the love of wives, mothers, children and living is a universal bond. All too often, though, and not unjustifiably given Fuller's cinema-fist style, it is assumed that he is having his cake and eating it, wallowing first in the brutalities of war, then in

the sentimentality engendered by these circumstances.

The same extremes, hardly surprisingly, turn up again in Fuller's latest war film, *The Big Red One* (ITC), most notably in a sequence where Sergeant Lee Marvin and his 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse' survive a seemingly fool-proof ambush and then, in a burned-out Panzer tank, surrounded by a field of corpses, deliver a Frenchwoman of her baby. Here Fuller's message is very much the same as before, but its effect is very different for a number of reasons.

In the first place, he is no longer offering arguments. Many of the earlier

BY TOM MILNE

films finished open-endedly, or at least had open ends tacked on to remind audiences of the business left unfinished by the successful termination of an engagement. 'There is no end to this story,' says the final title of *The Steel Helmet* (1950). 'The end of this story can only be written by you,' *Run of the Arrow* (1957) echoes in less ambivalent challenge. And in straining to signpost that unfinished business, chiefly through personal relationships, Fuller could sometimes belabour his connections to simplistic effect. In *The Steel Helmet*, for instance, the black medic played by James Edwards is all too pointedly linked both to the North Korean major for whom he is at one point mistaken and who later attempts to subvert him ('Back home you ride in the back of the bus. What are you fighting for?'), and to the veteran Nisei sergeant who is mistrusted by the patrol leader because of his slanting eyes, and who is also the subject of a subversion attempt.

In *The Big Red One* there are, to all intents and purposes, no personal relationships. The Sergeant and his Four Horsemen are minimally characterised, of course: Zab (Robert Carradine) as the 'Hemingway of the Bronx'; Griff (Mark Hamill) as an aspiring cartoonist with a thing about being unable to shoot an enemy whose eyes he can see; Vinci (Bobby Di Cicco) as a second-generation Italian waging war on Italians; Johnson (Kelly Ward) as discovering his vocation when he successfully delivers the baby. Beyond that they are simply a successful fighting unit, linked only by the gradually acquired combat skills which ensure their survival. And it is significant that when a replacement in the squad comes up with the inevitable taunt that Vinci is a wop, not one of the quintet reacts at first. Further badgered, Vinci delivers his comeuppance to the taunter with impersonal efficiency, as though detailed to clear a minefield, while the others watch equally dispassionately. This battle, in other words, has already been won, and is of no concern to the unit as such.

Behind this new willingness to bear witness, rather than to attempt to convince through controversial argument, lies Fuller's awareness that only cranks and diehard Nazis would disagree with his assessment of World War II as 'the one we winners call the right war,' the one in which 'for the first time in history countries that would never sleep together did sleep together to unite against what we called the common enemy—Hitler. He killed. And the only way to stop his killing was to kill his killers.*' So Sam Fuller's war simply rolls inexorably on as his 1st US Infantry Division, alias 'The Big Red One', moves from North Africa to Sicily, Italy, France, Belgium, Germany and Czechoslovakia, untroubled by the interracial tensions that leave their raw nerve-ends jangling in the earlier films, serenely confident that those

bystanders who die at their passing—even the inmates of an asylum innocently caught up in their attempt to silence a German gun—had to die to further a good cause.

The tension in the film springs from Fuller's own ambivalent reaction to the rightness of this right war. 'But even for such a reason, and I personally feel it was the right reason and the right move we made against [Hitler], it was wrong because the bottom line of living is that it is wrong to kill a human.' Left unresolved and unresolvable by Fuller, this dilemma is repeatedly re-enacted throughout the film. The attack on the monastery-asylum, for example, could have been achieved more efficiently and with greater economy (of life if not of funds) by an aerial bombing raid. But as the Sergeant tells his disgruntled squad, 'Killing insane people is not good for public relations.' 'Killing sane people is okay?' Griff snaps back. In the event, of course, not only are a number of the inmates killed, but legions of dogfaces.

A scene like this, echoing the Monte Cassino sequence in Wellman's *The Story of GI Joe* (a film Fuller admired greatly), is of course no stranger to the war movie. And there is in fact nothing in *The Big Red One* that has not been seen before, except possibly by virtue of Fuller's aforementioned gift (or penchant) for pushing to extremes. What makes the film unique is something else again: a curious quality of abstraction, all the more effective for being expressed almost exclusively in concrete terms.

Since *The Big Red One* had been in almost continuous gestation during the thirty-five years since Fuller himself served with the 1st US Infantry Division during the war, turning up more than once as an on-off Hollywood project, it is perhaps hardly surprising that its narrative should be framed in detached, highly formalised terms, contrasting sharply with the vivid tabloid qualities of *Merrill's Marauders*, and even more so with the heated anti-Communist excitement of *The Steel Helmet* and *Fixed Bayonets* (1951). The prologue, set in a no man's land in France in 1918 where Lee Marvin kills—'murders'—a German soldier four hours after the signing of the Armistice ends his legal and moral right to do so, looks uncannily as though it had strayed in from Franju's *Thomas l'Imposteur*. And not just because of the shell-shocked horse that gallops by, frenziedly rearing and lashing at Marvin with its hooves. The atmosphere is weird and unearthly, a graveyard haunted by apocalyptic spectres; a bullet-riddled, worm-eaten carving of Christ on the Cross, its brow rudely garlanded by Buñuelian field telephone wires, stands forlornly in the middle of nowhere, offering an empty benediction; and in this place where time stands still, its motion suddenly becomes the sole arbiter of innocence or guilt.

Predictably enough, the film comes full circle to both place and action, when Marvin again knifes a German soldier after the 1945 ceasefire, this time exorcising his guilt by desperately willing the German to live ('Look, you sonofabitch,

you're gonna live if I've got to blow your brains out'). But Fuller neutralises the inherent symbolism of the statue of Christ by placing another scene under its aegis (the ambush and birth of the baby), while the second 'murder' takes place elsewhere. Formalism, yes; but Fuller does not trade in abstract symbols, only concrete ones like the 'last bullet of the war' that finally finds its mark at the second attempt in *Run of the Arrow*.

Instead he opens the action proper of *The Big Red One* like any other movie: in a troop ship transporting the infantry division to North Africa in 1942 for invasion landings that may, or may not, be opposed by Vichy Frenchmen. As Zab's narration offers orthodox introductions to the four wetnoses who will become our heroes ('Johnson, this pig farmer with haemorrhoids ... Vinci, he was a street kid who played hot jazz on the saxophone. And that's me, I'm Zab. I thought I was the Hemingway of the Bronx'), the images offer equally orthodox impressions of the quartet first putting up a show of bravado, then beginning to struggle against apprehension.

But as the action proceeds in very much the same vein, with North Africa giving way to Sicily and Italy, and the quartet now becoming veterans, it gradually grows apparent that instead of getting to know our heroes better, we are losing them to a kind of anonymity. Simultaneously, as every single major battle of the war seems to head directly for the quartet and their sergeant, it becomes clear not only that they bear charmed lives—they are the survivors—but that Fuller is using them as objective correlatives, or rather correctives, to the usual sentimentalities of war.

'By now we'd come to look at all our replacements as dead men, and we temporarily had the use of their arms and legs,' Zab muses in his narration. So a whole string of these dead men, frightened, beardless boys, engage our attention for a moment with touching little character cameos before their heads are indeed blown off. Appalling, atrocious little tragedies of pure waste. Yet, secure in that our identification figures are immune, we the audience are less moved than relieved by these tragedies. In combat there is neither the time nor the inclination to worry about the other man, whose death in any case increases the odds on your chance of survival. 'The creepy thing about battle,' as Zab says, 'is that you always feel alone.'

During the war, John Huston's documentary *The Battle of San Pietro* was censored (among other things) for suggesting that the lives given up by dead soldiers were important not only to their country and to their family, but to themselves. Just after the war, Lewis Milestone's *A Walk in the Sun* contrived an oblique hint in the scene where, after a particularly bloody battle, a soldier who has survived sits down to compose a letter home in his mind: 'It was so easy ...' Since then, self-interest has become a not uncommon ingredient in the war film, though almost invariably, even when accorded a certain approval (as in Aldrich's *Too Late the Hero*), balanced

by a strict accounting in terms of the cost to other people. But Fuller, through his mouthpiece Zab, is surely unique in not only insisting, but demonstrating, that 'Surviving is the only glory in war.'

Central to this conception are two parallel scenes in which Lee Marvin's Sergeant, and his German *alter ego* Schroeder (Siegfried Rauch), are each shown drawing the fine distinctions of war to a recalcitrant member of their squads in almost precisely the same terms: 'We don't murder. We kill.' It may sound like a facile device, but it is extraordinarily effective in pinning down the precise quality of abstraction Fuller is after: the notion of the only good soldier as being the one who survives, who can turn himself into an automaton without fear, conscience or extraneous involvement, the better able to kill without being killed, and therefore winning wars. If Schroeder/Germany loses in the end, despite his mastery of these skills, it is only because of the moral distinction drawn in his dialogue by comparison with the Sergeant's. 'We don't murder the enemy, we kill them,' says Schroeder the Nazi. 'You don't murder animals, you kill 'em,' says America's Sergeant.

But while these abstractions proceed towards winning their war, they are simultaneously given body by Fuller's characteristically racy dialogue, mainly attributed to Zab. At first this takes the form of simple front-line griping: 'You know how you smoke out a sniper? You send a guy out into the open and you see if he gets shot.' Gradually the tone becomes sharper, assuming an edge of callous indifference as the Sergeant, groping in the vicinity of a wetnose wounded in the lower belly, tosses away some detached particle and cheerfully announces 'Just one of your balls, Smitty. You can live without it. That's why they give you two.' Shortly before this, about to go into his first action, Smitty had timidly approached the veteran Zab for reassurance as to his chances of survival: 'You think ... you think maybe I'll get it?' Zab simply stares at him for a cool count of five, then, 'Why not? You some-thin' special?'

Smitty dies because he doesn't think that he can survive, so he can never become part of the machine Fuller speaks of in describing the film: 'There is no discussion about the dead or wounded or missing because each man is only interested in his own survival, and when you put together hundreds of thousands of young men who have that same selfish, honest, personal thought—then you have a machine that will whip the enemy. And that we did.' It is the paradoxes enshrined in that sentence—selfish/honest, personal/machine—that animate *The Big Red One*, giving it the flesh and blood it has shaken off, lending it the emotion it determinedly refuses to indulge, asking the unanswerable questions it never openly poses. What price glory at the cost of such abstraction from the real human business of living and loving? ■

*All quotations, other than those from films, are from Fuller's article 'The Big Red One interviews Samuel Fuller' in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, August 1980.

Michael Powell's critical reputation has probably never stood higher. This most enigmatic and idiosyncratic of British filmmakers was interviewed for *SIGHT AND SOUND* in 1979, shortly after the National Film Theatre staged a major retrospective of his work and the BFI published the monograph *Powell, Pressburger and Others*. The interview concentrated on Powell's wartime films.

MARK

Peeping Tom has no trace of thriller or mystery; even the murders committed by its central character, Mark Lewis, are as purposeless as art. The apparatus of killings, clues and coppers takes second place to the circling machinery that carries film and the accompaniment of twin pianos. Within the Sunday papers melodrama, there is a tenderly observed process of destructive fulfilment. Among movie suicides, this one is earned and rapturous. The killer nearly succeeds in giving himself away when pencils slip from his pocket; Michael Powell had them made three feet long and filmed their spill in slowed motion so that the giveaway would loom large. So much more imaginative than the police, the murderer plots his own dead end, designs and directs it, and then kindly saves the trouble of courts, hangmen or shrinks; he does not want anyone else to touch him.

Mark Lewis' demure, anonymous tidiness is the mark of the timid tenderness he feels for himself. Who put the idea of tenderness in our heads? Why, Michael Powell himself ('A very tender film, a very nice one,' he has been quoted as saying), slyly adding to his own greatest controversy—like a wizard dropping a cocktail cherry in a spell.

Above: Carl Boehm. Below: Moira Shearer; Anna Massey and Carl Boehm; Brenda Bruce (as one of Mark's victims); Boehm and Shearer; Michael Powell lining up a shot.



Here David Thomson writes about *Peeping Tom*, now twenty years old, received with outrage at the time of its first release, and still the most controversial and perplexing of Powell's films, even though critical opinion has shifted from the 1960 reaction, when Dilys Powell called it 'essentially vicious', Caroline Lejeune 'this beastly film', Alexander Walker 'loathsome', and George Stonier

worried that 'anyone at all can entertain this muck.'

In *Peeping Tom*, Carl Boehm plays Mark Lewis, a young man who has a small job in films and in his spare time takes pornographic pictures for a newsagent. Mark's father had used his own child as a guinea-pig for experiments in the study of fear. Grown-up, Mark becomes a murderer of

women, fascinated with photographing the victim's moment of terror. He has a tentative relationship with Helen Stephens (Anna Massey), a girl who with her blind mother rents a flat in his house. Accidentally, Helen sees the film of one of Mark's victims, killed in a deserted film studio. Eventually and inevitably, Mark makes his last film record—of his own suicide.

OF THE RED DEATH

BY DAVID THOMSON

It fits the film's gentle fostering of a lonely man's lethal art. *Peeping Tom* is as intricate, fastidious and unbalanced as a home movie. Mark Lewis is a fervent spectator who reaches the crisis of needing to be seen. It is his only way of establishing existence and authorship, and it is far more pressing than the fanciful psychosis that is supposed to victimise him. He is an artist, and in Powell's eyes that self-consuming glory overshadows any question of sickness or health.

Mark Lewis is a Romantic extremist who amuses himself by seeming modest and humdrum. His art must be unseen and unknown if he is to go on producing it. But his furtive regime of art for art's sake is broken apart by Mark's emergence from his own chrysalis. His wings are his film show. But it is so much a farewell, confessional appearance, so driven by the longing to be recognised, how can we not wonder about it as a personal disclosure—no matter how mischievously indirect—by its director? Yet just as a *Peeping Tom* must remain clandestine, so even the portrait offered in *Peeping Tom* is teasingly oblique. The last thing it wants is understanding: the Romantic artist would prefer to be recog-

nised while remaining mysterious. When a wizard is identified, his strangeness is confirmed.

There have been several attempts to retrieve *Peeping Tom* from its original London debacle—by critics, notably Ian Johnson in 1963 and Jean-Paul Torok in 1960, and by such as Martin Scorsese who assisted the film's re-release in America. They have placed it in the body of Powell's work, assessed it as a metaphor for cinema and voyeurism, revelled in its sardonic playfulness, called it great as love story, tragedy and salutary verdict on the traps of seeing and being seen. In America, in 1979-80, the film was occasionally picketed by feminists disturbed by a disdain they read as hostility. Elsewhere, it was watched with fascination and chills: it never set out to be a comfortable picture, and rescue of the movie does it no credit by awarding it the sanitary status of a masterpiece.

The picture sustains so many charges that, while we are about it, we might as well retain the 1960 reaction: 'The only really satisfactory way to dispose of *Peeping Tom* would be to shovel it up and flush it swiftly down the nearest sewer' (the less than reactionary Derek Hill). That shuddering revulsion is no

more off the mark, and no less instructive, than Susan Sontag's intellectual allegiance: 'The movie assumes connections between impotence and aggression, professionalised looking and cruelty, which point to the central fantasy connected with the camera.'

Late in 1979, I showed Susan Sontag's book *On Photography*, from which this quotation comes, to Powell. He told me he had not seen it before, and I think he read its commentary with the same vague form of pleasure and indifference. Michael Powell is in the next office while I am writing this: how handy, if I want to consult him on details, and how deluding. It is a rare frustration to admire *Peeping Tom* and to be with its director. There are things I have learned about the making of the film, or tidbits he has dropped in my path, and they may add to your sense of the film. But it is most instructive to see Powell's remoteness from anything as mundane as critical understanding.

Powell lives in a different house—even if he is in the next room. Who can forget the startling shift in awareness in *Peeping Tom* when we learn that its shyest occupant actually owns the house? Mark's upstairs flat is an austere



separate domain. More ominous than the floor above in *John Gabriel Borkman*, or the cellar in *Psycho*, it represents the imagination lurking behind every sociable countenance.

Michael Powell is seventy-five, and a picture of health. He can spread enormous charm and vitality; or he can be absent-minded and cavalier. We have been colleagues, at Dartmouth College, and most of the time we think of each other as friends. I believe he is Britain's most remarkable director; I shock him by putting him so far above Hitchcock. But he is as unknowable as anyone I have ever met, and unshakeable in his determination to remain in the upstairs flat.



Peeping Tom had its origins in a film on the life of Freud; yet Powell is as unimpressed by clinical analysis as Nabokov was. Powell was in his fifties, only lately parted from Emeric Pressburger, his Hungarian collaborator. In 1956, he terminated a partnership that had begun in 1939 with *The Spy in Black*. The famous logo for the Archers—with the arrow smacking into the bull's-eye—had had Powell and Pressburger sharing production, direction and writing. But Pressburger had far less to do with the directing, and much more responsibility for the script. It is hard to think of another screenwriting career so pledged to one director. Before 1939, Pressburger had accumulated several credits on the continent. But after meeting Powell, his freelance range shrank. In 1953, he wrote, produced and directed an unremarkable film, *Twice Upon a Time*, and in 1957 he wrote and produced *Miracle in Soho*, with Julian Amyes directing. Otherwise, since retirement, he has had only one practising credit, the writing on Powell's 1972 children's film *The Boy Who Turned Yellow*, although his 1961 novel, *Killing a Mouse on Sunday*, was filmed as *Behold a Pale Horse*.

There was never a personal breakdown. They have remained friends, and they are now co-consultants on a planned Broadway musical of *The Red Shoes*. But why did the partnership end, and what were the effects on Powell? He admits that he was instrumental in the change. They had not had a hit since *The Red Shoes*, and even that success came slowly and never fully vanquished Rank's bewilderment. Against the grain of austerity, they followed a wayward line: *Gone to Earth* (unsatisfactory to Selznick); *The Elusive Pimpernel* (scorned by Goldwyn); *The Tales of Hoffmann* (an affront to nearly everyone); and *Oh, Rosalinda!* (which Powell himself doubted all along). *The Battle of the River Plate* did better, but it illustrates Powell's whimsical off-handedness that the couple only undertook it to justify a visit to the Mar Del Plata festival. Its move towards realism irked Powell and showed a widening gulf in taste between the two men.

Powell had never concealed his feelings towards 'the curse of naturalism' or his opinion of the cautious and philistine movie industry. His work was serenely out of touch and unprofitable, and yet he



Michael Powell (centre) cast himself as Mark's psychologist father.

could entertain plans of having Stravinsky and Dylan Thomas collaborate on pictures in the iridescent vein of *Tales of Hoffmann*—flamboyant amalgams of music, verse, colour, dance and decor, Art in Powell's mind, but fevered artiness to many others. Michael Powell is pledged to the idea of Art, unswervingly fauve, and impulsive in his tastes, but clipped and conservative in his own bearing. In the same instant, he can sound like Ruskin while delving in what Raymond Durgnat has called 'the visual culture of Ye Olde Junke Shoppe'. His colour is never cool or controlled; it vibrates with the gleeful unruliness of a Gully Jimson blowing raspberries at Mondrian. Powell often worked in coloured film noir (that's what Scorsese loves), with the shadows suffused by purple, pink and blue. His genius is a matter of having no restraining sense of how others see him. And, of course, the record of tasteful colour in movies is very dull.

If this attitude made him less than his own best negotiator, then perhaps Pressburger was a necessary go-between and producer. Without him, Powell has had not one success and not one movie that looks anything but ill-advised. In other words, the separation may have left Powell acutely uncertain about his future. That would only push him into the most idiosyncratic and perilous ventures.

Between the end of the partnership and *Peeping Tom*, Powell made *Ill Met by Moonlight*, a war picture, debonair and fierce by turns,* and an addition to his gallery of prickly-fond Anglo-German relationships, and *Honeymoon*, a paella of flashy dance and tourist Espana, with Massine and Antonio. He scripted both films himself, and cannot have been reassured about anything, least of all the latest wave of realism in England. He had survived Grierson, ignored wartime utility and now he faced kitchen sink. Sad about his own fortunes, gloomy at

*According to Powell, Pressburger began that script and wanted a realism of which Powell despaired.

the times, was he ever tempted to go for broke and show himself?

Leo Marks, who wrote *Peeping Tom*, was a kind of analyst. He had worked on codes and cyphers in the war, and he was the original of the character played by Paul Scofield in *Carve Her Name with Pride*. Powell remembers him as a very intelligent, impenetrable colleague: he always turned up on the director's doorstep behind a large, freshly lit cigar. They worked together on a life of Freud, in part because Marks was the son of a psychiatrist. That plan was well advanced when John Huston announced what was to become *Freud—The Secret Passion*. (This was the second time that Huston stole Powell's thunder; Powell had planned *The African Queen*, with David Farrar and Bette Davis.)

So one level of research was pushed beneath the surface, and another scheme popped up. That is nearly enough Powell's brisk description of how *Peeping Tom* came into being. But he also told me once that he fancied the first project had given Marks an opportunity to 'study' him, so that the second venture was the fruit of what the writer had learned about the director. Did Powell think that in 1960? He is hard to pin down now to any of the sub-texts in *Peeping Tom*. Yet he has admitted that he always identified with Mark's anguish, and he may have had half a feeling—like Welles when he looked at Herman Man-kiewicz's script—that there was an image of himself just beneath the surface.

Marks could have seen something Powell has since owned up to: 'I felt very close to the hero, who is an "absolute" director, someone who approaches life like a director, who is conscious of and suffers from it. He is a technician of emotion. And I am someone who is thrilled by technique, always mentally editing the scene in front of me on the street, so I was able to share his anguish.' He might also have noticed that Powell's claims of deep feelings never disturb a robust, bantering aloofness.

The tension in all his work, between restraint and emotionalism, is never more



'The most potent figure in the film': Maxine Audley as the blind mother.

evident in life than in the way he leaves his own emotional life vague. Susan Sontag's diagnosis is that *Peeping Tom* acts out the alienation from life that the camera instils. I suspect Powell would reject that association if it were put to him directly—in which case we have to let it emerge indirectly. The special force of *Peeping Tom* is the torrential, pained, yet somehow placid self-awareness of Mark Lewis. Powell himself is closer to the bristling stiff upper lip of Lermontov in *The Red Shoes*, in love with his dancer but determined not to spoil things by admitting it. As the surrealists knew, love yearned for has a purity always blurred by the common act.

Of course, Leo Marks the code-breaker made the photographer-hero a close anagram of himself. But Powell dressed Carl Boehm for the part in his own old clothes—to this day, Powell wears the tan-coloured wind-breaker that makes Mark so discreet. That and his duffle-coat clash with Boehm's German accent and a forlorn melancholy that everyone except Powell hears as a Peter Lorre homage. The clothes-swapping is a detail Powell only conceded in conversation. Far more declaratory was his original decision to play the father who has trained Mark in fear and photography.

Powell's explanation of that is always made straight-faced. He realised that he would need a child prepared to have a lizard dropped in his bed. Could he ask that of an unknown professional? Instead, he cast his own son, Columba, confident that the child would not be distressed by the experience if the father was close at hand. If I add that Columba has grown up to be a mural painter who once presented his father with a portrait of dragons, you can see how delicately we sit between art and life. And just as there is an airy unworldliness in Powell, so that he might never have pondered on any of these decisions, so he is also a master of innuendo whose *Peeping Tom* can scarcely utter a line without leaving extra meanings in the air.

The father is a professor of psychology: he wrote a shelf of books as if he were

Freud. He experimented with his young son's fear, and filmed the terror. It is movie gobbledygook—as cheerfully ignorant as the spectacular mind-scaping of *Spellbound*—that sees Mark growing up as a polite young man who can lapse into exotic pathology whenever the plot requires it. The professor is more wizard than scientist, and Mark's illness is as irrational as the search for perfection. Powell's own home-movie appearance as Dad—with a voluptuous and much younger stepmother for Mark—involves his careful adjustment of the focus on the camera filming him. No one being filmed knows the focus is out, but wizards know and can pick on the very detail that mocks the scheme of illness in the instant of tracing it. In addition, on the tapes, it is Powell's own voice—sinister but suave—that comforts and goads the child. This one cameo in *Peeping Tom* is more chilling than all Hitchcock's appearances added together.



The psychology within *Peeping Tom* is too naive to be Powell's central concern. In very few of his films is motivation worked out thoroughly. His people react helplessly to violent impulses—the closest to complex behaviour is the way the David Farrar character in *The Small Back Room* needs a bottle of whisky in the house if he is to stop drinking. The perverse relief of a fetish denied but kept in view is just as vital an antagonism in Mark's imagination. But the ordeal in *Peeping Tom* is not investigated; it is simply enacted through the cinematic process. Most notable of all, Mark does not want to be cured. At one point, he asks an alleged specialist about his prospects, and dismisses the not unreasonable prognosis. He would rather be apotheosised in spectacle than made whole in life.

Ordinary life is as scarce in Powell's films as it is in Hitchcock's. But whereas Hitch aspired to its anonymity, Powell flinches from what it represents. The evidence of that is his inability to film

anything for its own sake, for what it is, in a documentary spirit. Seeing for Powell is always the means to expressive insight. Not one of his films is reconciled to the world of appearance. Vision is always a tribute to imaginative will or nobility. Seeing, therefore, is the mark of an inspired disturbance.

That is what separates Powell from an analysis of voyeurism. Whereas *Rear Window* is a nagging attempt to see and ascertain facts, *Peeping Tom* is a pursuit of transcendence. *The Red Shoes* shows this need for fiction. Just as it prepares us for a ballet that might actually be performed on a stage, so the dance that transpires is only possible on a movie screen. All Powell films realise the impossible to vindicate an absurd faith in imagination.

So the collection of eyes in Powell's films is not a catalogue of seeing, but a testament to private belief in revelation. Powell's eye sings with the exultation of romantic imagination: it swoons with perspiration in *The Small Back Room*; it flutters with anticipation in the peep through the curtain in *The Red Shoes*; it plays with magic spectacles in *The Tales of Hoffmann*; and in *A Matter of Life and Death* the eye that slowly sinks in anaesthesia is an ecstatic yielding to unconsciousness. And yet... the film is also full of jokes about the camera as a sexual limb which, in Powell's uniquely disjointed artistic personality, do not detract from the reverence that judges the work of Mark Lewis as being as worthy as Lermontov's in *The Red Shoes*.

The filming of the several whores and models in *Peeping Tom* that precedes their being impaled on the erect, pricking front leg of the tripod is too schematically sexual to be felt erotically. But it is nasty because of our complicity, the brusqueness towards the women and Mark's creepy concentration. Take those things together, and you have the recurring threat to all Powell's films: the preferring of art to people. Even when he is cheerful, Powell can be garish or mystical. In his darker moods, there is a rapacious misanthropy. He encouraged screwed-down acting that suddenly bursts out with unvanquished feeling. The coherent development of emotion leaves him uneasy: he was never an especially sympathetic director of actors.

The world of *Peeping Tom* is so full of spying and malice that the one untainted character, Helen (Anna Massey), seems stilted and perfunctory. Otherwise, everyone is the projection of Mark's nervous conviction that they must be watching him. The whores are cliché sluts who may see his timidity. The cops are rough heavies. The newsagent's shop is riddled with hypocrisy and meanness. The film director—as blind as actor Esmond Knight—is fatuously bad-tempered.

Most baleful of all are the red-headed women that crowd the film, like furies in a bloodshot dream. Helen has red hair, and there is the sketch of a love affair between her and Mark. Elliott Stein has said 'there is no more moving doomed love affair in any film' (*Film Comment*, September-October 1979). But this love is only talked about, not felt. They are at

the childhood stage represented in *Un Chien Andalou* (and Buñuel, incidentally, is Michael Powell's favourite director). It is as cursory and unlikely as the thought of a cure for Mark. Powell's films rarely seem persuaded by love: *The Small Back Room* is one exception where the war, a tin foot and every dread of failure is erased by the tranquil lust of Kathleen Byron. More often, 'love' is the polite, Tory disguise for overwhelming imaginative involvement. The nearest Powell comes to real love is between people somehow sworn to restraint, or unable to see one another—like the radio romance between David Niven and Kim Hunter in *A Matter of Life and Death*.

Apart from Helen, who is also a narrative device, *Peeping Tom* has a gang of copper-headed harpies. At the film studio, the hapless Shirley Ann Field—cream-sherry coloured for the occasion—is the ultimate idiot actress. In the photographic studio, there is a languid redhead, arresting in profile, but defaced when she turns round by a scar on her mouth. One of Mark's victims, dancing for him in an empty studio, is the Moira Shearer who leaped like a flame in *The Red Shoes*. But now she is reduced to a trite, jazzy routine, without conviction or magic. Powell and Shearer may have joked about the changed circumstances, but it is poor thanks for one of the most uninhibited performances in a Powell film. The casting alone could make you think that Powell was depressed when he made *Peeping Tom*.

That still leaves the most potent figure in the film: Helen's mother, played as another redhead by Maxine Audley. The part was meant for Pamela Brown, a close friend of Powell's who appears in *I Know Where I'm Going* and *The Tales of Hoffmann*. Pamela Brown was unable to play the role, so Maxine Audley substituted. According to Powell, the two actresses plotted together and Audley turned up on set with her own hair dyed red. To believe that, you would have to accept that Powell, on the spur of the moment, saw the similarity in Audley's hair and the whisky the mother drinks. However it occurred, the meditative resentment in the close-ups of her red hair suggest dried blood and the crimson hues of the dark room.

The mother is blind but knowing. She has guessed Mark's guilty secret before anyone else. She preys on him and penetrates his sanctum. Far from being a figure of wisdom and charity, she is rivetingly morose and ominous. Her blindness is a denial of Mark's mission; it also represents the corrosive despair of a world without 'vision'. She seems protective of her daughter, but the film gives no comfort to anyone wanting to trust parenthood, and the mother might as easily want to keep Helen the prisoner of an invalid's self-pity. There is one astonishing taunt and double-meaning, when Helen is going out with Mark and mentions the doorkey, whereupon the mother, half-soaked in whisky, murmurs 'Your key needs working and my lock wants oiling.' It is amusing only for an instant. Then it seems like a glimpse of sexual self-hatred and a heartfelt digression in a supposedly suspenseful film.

Just because no one in 1960 could be very coherent about why *Peeping Tom* was disturbing, does not lessen its savage reachfulness.



Peeping Tom had a dreadful reception in Britain in 1960. But few critics had ever appreciated Powell's films. Today, Powell declares that after it no distributor would trust him. I wonder. Anyone awake must have known since 1940 that Powell's regime was unorthodoxy. *Peeping Tom* was jerked out of sight, like any scandal in England. But did it really warn or persuade the industry not to touch Powell again? He made another film next year, *The Queen's Guards*, his third commercial flop in a row. I suspect that Powell's withdrawal was the result of box-office failure and of his own disenchantment. He need not have suspected it at the time, but by the mid 60s perhaps he himself saw the affinity between Mark's exposure and his own splendid disaster.

You can lament the ideas unfilmed, and share Jonathan Rosenbaum's feeling that *Peeping Tom* is the only New Wave picture ever made in Britain—because of its interest in movies, presumably. But I cannot detect any such modern sensibility in the film. It has no naturalness, no spontaneity. Rather, it is an offshoot of German film of the 1920s, the most profound influence on Powell's work apart from that of Rex Ingram, his first mentor. In the 1978 booklet, *Powell, Pressburger and Others*, Ian Christie seems to relate Powell to the first frenzy of camera-identification in the New Wave. He quotes Powell (from a French interview):

'I live cinema. I chose the cinema when I was very young, sixteen years old, and from then on my memories virtually coincide with the history of the cinema. I have worked actively in the cinema for the last forty years and I live equally in the future, since I'm profoundly dissatisfied with what has been done so far. As I've already said, I'm not a director with a personal style, I am simply cinema. I have grown up with and through the cinema; everything that I've had in the way of education has been through the cinema; insofar as I'm interested in images, in books, in music, it's all due to the cinema.' (*Midi-Minuit Fantastique*, October 1968)

If that is New Wave, then it only demonstrates how much Romantic obscurantism there was in early Godard. The Sontagian ambiguities of photography are not especially relevant to Powell. *Peeping Tom* is not an analysis of voyeurism, or even a conscious reference to cinema. I rather doubt that Powell has ever been an avid film-goer: that alone separates him from Godard. But against the historical tradition of impersonality in the British cinema, Powell understood the auteur theory before it was ever formulated. He was less auteur than tyrant. That's where Ingram's example is so important. Ingram had been a Hollywood giant. But he left America when he was thwarted by MGM over *Ben-Hur* and sought to make

his own kingdom, first in Nice, then in North Africa.

The Archers, and the skill we can assume in Pressburger, allowed Powell independence. The wonder is that his refusal to compromise survived as long as it did. His whimsical, idiosyncratic attitude to the war is a triumph of English tolerance and of Powell's private progress. But we would be stupid to suppose that he did not earn and court enemies. One day, he chose to act as if they were too much for him. Yet only because of his innate determination that nothing but art mattered. Thomas Elsaesser's excellent review of *The Tales of Hoffmann* in *Brighton Film Review* (1968) does make a satisfactory link between this man and Godard: 'The nihilism of Powell's films is so thorough and relentless that it forces him into a desperate aestheticism, where the only moral stance is the hopeless affirmation of a doomed innocence, born from too much knowledge and self-awareness about the events of our world.'

How well that covers the struggle of Mark Lewis, Helen and her mother; or of Lermontov, Victoria Page and the shoemaker in *The Red Shoes*. Michael Powell teaches us to look past the money and technology in movies to the profuse sensation of the screen. Like Lermontov, Powell has tried to ignore reality and personal relationships. His terrible secret is that he sees movie as a Wagner opera or a pagan ritual. *Peeping Tom* is a grim, tongue-in-cheek, rueful work, but it burns, whisky red, like a sacrificial pyre.

Powell is a dedicated extremist. It is very hard to pick any of his major films and point to areas of compromise. Far more often, it is remarkable that he pushed things past censors and financiers, and won such acceptance from audiences. For so great a Romantic, everything is a matter of life and death at the edge of the world. It was the everyday perspective of realism that chafed Powell. He and his characters live for red-letter days, whatever the cost. By far the fiercest crisis is that of the person who strives to make art of the tumult around and within him. To dismantle a bomb, to win a reprieve for love, to know where you are going, to spirit aristocrats from under Chauvelin's nose—those are all kin to art.

But in Powell's work, the three noblest heroes are Hoffmann, Lermontov and Mark Lewis. (Prospero would have made a fourth if ever *The Tempest* had been filmed.) All are men whose attempt at reality has produced a wintry or sad contempt for its claims. Lermontov remains the essential Powell hero: un-English, uncompromising, lyrically rude, ecstatically restrained and plunged in visions. Nevertheless, he screeches with agony at the end of *The Red Shoes*. Mark is not as tight-lipped. But his willingness to talk does not permit self-pity. Leo Marks and the research on Freud may account for the circumstantial psychological background. Powell's own vocation explains the tools of movie-making and image-taking. But Mark lives for art and death. His own life needs only his ghostly commitment: the Peeping Tom is watching himself.



'Jane Austen in Manhattan': Pierre (Robert Powell) with his theatre group.

All the World's a Stage

Jane Austen in Manhattan/Tom Milne

As everyone surely knows by now, *Jane Austen in Manhattan* (Contemporary) creates a companion hullabaloo to the delightfully Jamesian squabble fomented around Georgie and Bonnie's pictures by the Merchant-Ivory-Jhabvala triumvirate, with the bone of contention this time being a fragment of Jane Austen juvenilia: the manuscript of her play adapted from Richardson's novel *Sir Charles Grandison*, bought at auction in New York and then fought over by rival producers anxious to stage it on and off Broadway.

But where the earlier film was greeted enthusiastically, *Jane Austen in Manhattan* seems to have gone down like a slice of stale seed cake. Choking over the likelihood that anyone could want to stage something so manifestly trivial (and thus begging the question of the theatre's persistent efforts to render stageworthy anything from plays by Picasso to the Nighttown episodes from Joyce's *Ulysses*), critical venom was mostly vented on the character of Pierre (Robert Powell), the experimentalist guru in charge of the 'Manhattan Encounter Theater Laboratory', who was instantly pigeon-holed away in pseudos

corner. All of which seems to have little to do with a reading of the play itself, which is more concerned to stir up some gentle mockery around the perennial preoccupation in the arts with 'seeking the bubble reputation', the pursuit of which demonstrates (to go back to the beginning of the same passage in *As You Like It*) the extent to which all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. As the film begins, Ivory's camera closely observes the bidding in the Sotheby-Parke Bernet auction rooms, noting the reluctance with which George Midash (Michael Wager),

representing the arts foundation established by his wealthy family, responds to Pierre's imperious signals to run the bidding up until he finally secures the manuscript for \$55,000.

On a nice private joke (the next item announced for sale, 22 letters from Jean Rhys to Ford Madox Ford, heralds his project to film Rhys' *Quartet*), Ivory then cuts to a location scene by a waterfall, with masked men in 18th century costume pitching a hapless lady into a sedan chair and making off with her. The very prototype of costume romance, this scene wryly acknowledges the film's own exploitation of Jane Austen as a costly property (bought at auction by David Astor, the MS was passed, through London Weekend Television, to Merchant Ivory Productions to see what they could do with it), and suggests that one look for similar motivations in the rival producers: on the one hand Pierre himself, and on the other, Lilianna Zorska (Anne Baxter), a fading Broadway star currently looking for the main chance while conducting acting classes.

At which point, literally thickening the plot with echoes from *Sir Charles Grandison*, not to mention the element of conspiracy from Rivette's *Paris Nous Appartient*, Victor (Kurt Johnson), a rising star of musical comedy and former pupil of Lilianna's, excitedly claims that his wife Ariadne (Sean Young) has been seduced away from him by Pierre, and enlists Lilianna's aid in winning her back. Having thus chalked up strike one against Pierre, the film then proceeds to strike two: the defection from his group of Jamie (Tim Choate), resentful because he feels his career has ground to a standstill in the avant-garde commune, and because he is required to work days as a taxi-driver to earn money promptly annexed by Pierre 'for us all'. Strike

three, the *coup de grâce*, comes when the rehearsals in which Pierre breaks down the Jane Austen play, reconstructing it in a graceless jumble of comic-strip cartoonery and Commedia dell'Arte mime, are counterpointed by glimpses of the way Lilianna envisions it, enacted as an 18th century opera on a Georgian stage against austere-painted flats: cool, elegant and graceful.

So much for the text, but in the subtext Pierre refuses to be given out. In the first place he has nothing to do with Victor's desertion by Ariadne, who gravitates to his group partly because he fills the bill in her yearning for a guru, and partly, one may imagine, because being the wife of Broadway's current musical comedy toast doesn't hold too much promise of fulfilment. Since she is involved in a traumatic relationship with another actress in the group, Pierre is clearly not sleeping with her; and the fact that he never even thought of her that way is underlined by the scene in which, urged Method-style to bring personal experience to bear on her performance as the kidnapped heroine, she finally responds to Pierre's promptings to recall an occasion when someone abducted her with the mildly accusatory, 'You did!' The surprise—and sense of sudden illumination—underlying Pierre's 'I did?' is genuine, and undoubtedly inspires the change in the melting, helpless heroine of Lilianna's imagination to the more spirited virago of the collaborative production with which the film closes.

Secondly, although Pierre is typecast as the kidnapper, complete with diabolic club-foot, it is *he* who is robbed of everything by highwaymen who steal his play, company, production and even (in the appalled reactions of the grants committee to his work) his competence. And although the evidence is to the contrary—Pierre's rehabilitation of a mentally disturbed youth by developing his acting gifts; the testimony of a member of the group who forayed into the commercial theatre but came running back; Pierre's readiness to let Ariadne return to Victor, to forgo the funds collected by members when their needs are pressing, to initiate a fruitful collaboration with Lilianna—the characters all finally concur, either openly or by implication, that Pierre is a fraud. 'You're a con man!' says Lilianna, articulating a charge to which Pierre's only reply is the purloining of a silver jug from George's heirlooms, a treasure he can spare and which can be put to better use. A metaphor, one might say, for the dormant talents Pierre exploits in others.

And here—in the third place—one comes to the question of Pierre's production of the Jane Austen play, actually staged by the avant-garde New York director Andrei Serban as a fascinating sequence of dismantlings in which theatricality is taken apart to see what makes it tick. First, the preliminary reading, not so very different from the 'Italian' rehearsal method used by Renoir, in which one actor reads the stage directions and another the dialogue

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as the rest mime the action in exaggerated movement and gesture. Then, building on this breakdown, the staging of one scene as a mad hatter's tea party, isolating the absurdity of conventional social behaviour in the anti-social context of a kidnapping. And finally the dress rehearsal, where Sylvester and Tweetie Pie meet the Commedia dell'Arte in a set topsy-turvy suggestive of a padded cell, expressing Pierre's sense of 'the chaos reflected in the human psyche'.

Of course, as Pierre himself remarks, everything he has to offer is *negative*: an exposure of cliché and, he hopes, an uncovering of new perceptions. Watching Victor rehearse a brilliant pastiche Bob Fosse number for his next Broadway musical, one is reminded that the eccentric, off-balance movements characteristic of Fosse's choreography probably derived from experiments just such as Pierre's. Witnessing Jamie's remarkable presence as the clergyman innocent in

the 'collaborative' production at the end, one is reminded of Jamie's earlier scorn against Pierre for instructing him to play the part as a ten-year-old child.

Of course, too, Pierre is *also* every bit as self-serving as Lilianna in that he is vying with her to get his name up in lights. Otherwise this wouldn't be the Jane Austen comedy of manners that it is, matching the delightfully sidelong wit of *Hullabaloo over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures* as all the major characters (and all the performances are superb) play charades concealing their true impulses: Pierre as the humanitarian masquerading as a charlatan, Lilianna as the fulsome earth mother with a vindictive knife in each hand, George as the advocate of progress who cannot bear the prospect of change. All except Ariadne, that is, who finds her guru where there is none, and who disappears through the looking-glass to a destination that remains the film's secret. □

already privileged spectators in the first dozen rows of the stalls. Entrusting a film version of *Don Giovanni* (Artificial Eye), not only one of the greatest of all operas but one of the trickiest to stage satisfactorily, to a *cinéaste* as untested in the form as Losey is another instance of Liebermann's star-system policy.

To catalogue the full gamut of Losey's misjudgments would require as lengthy a list as that kept by Leporello of his master's conquests—'*mille e tre*'. With flunkies solemnly bearing the registers down the steps of the Villa Rotonda and Leporello unfolding yet another weighty segment before the horrified but spell-bound gaze of Donna Elvira, this aria, however, might have offered the film's one felicitous *trouvaille*—had not Losey inserted a shot of a nubile young servant-girl bathing her breasts at a nearby pool. Its superfluity apart, the image belongs to a quite different, even diametrically opposed, framework of artifice: that of soft-core cinematic eroticism. Putting it as delicately as possible, the presence of such youthfully photogenic beauty scarcely reinforces one's credence in the elaborate court paid by Giovanni to the Zerlina of Teresa Berganza, to whose plump soubrette charms, one now regretfully discovers, theatrical distanciation has lent considerable enchantment.

But this lapse is indicative of how little reflection Losey has brought to bear on the thorny question of 'opening out' an art form as corseted in conventions as opera (and which was magnificently resolved by the Straubs in their *Moses und Aron*). Conventions of singing/speaking: when Don Ottavio stalks across a meadow vowing to avenge Donna Anna, is he 'speaking in song' or genuinely 'singing' (given that he kicks a snoring yokel as if for applause)? Conventions of gesture: the whole grotesquely misconceived business of Leporello masked as Giovanni and vice-versa, where the singers, practically holding their masks at arm's length, were apparently encouraged by Losey to vie with each other in implausibility. And, above all, conventions of space: in the opera house, we never query the incongruity of a large cast crowded on to one restricted performing area. Here, with the two pairs of Dons and Donnas, Leporello and assorted peasantry endlessly bustling around an admittedly stunning Palladian villa and its environs, which Losey might have, but did not, coherently theatricalise—by flattening perspectives, for example—we seem to be peeping in on some eighteenth century experiment in communal living. A peak of absurdity is reached when Elvira, a moment after leaving Giovanni, rounds a corner and (in what is, theatrically, a new scene) rather unnecessarily screams: 'I find you again!' But such intrinsic difficulties were not insoluble. If Visconti's cinema can reasonably claim to be 'operatic' (as this epithet is slackly used in film criticism), it's less by virtue of its 'baroque' sensibility than that the visual articulation of, say, *Senso* derives logically from the fundamental stage picture



'Don Giovanni': Kiri Te Kanawa as Donna Elvira, with Leporello's list.

'Mi tradi ...'

Don Giovanni/Gilbert Adair

The boldest print of *Don Giovanni*'s poster, beneath the glowering features of Raimondi's Don, is reserved for two prestigious names, Mozart and Joseph Losey. But, to complete what has unquestionably been sold as a cultural 'package', two others should be appended: those of Daniel Toscan du Plantier, Gaumont's self-styled Irving Thalberg, and Rolf Liebermann, director (now ex-director) of the Paris Opéra, who jointly conceived the project. Liebermann was widely heralded as the Messiah of the Opéra (which was certainly in urgent want of a saviour) and it would be churlish to deny his immense achievements. Less admirable, though, was his

dependence on opera's international circuit of stars, to the detriment of a woefully neglected national school, and too frequent mismatching of project and director: Peter Ustinov's calamitous *Don Quichotte*, a vapid *Orfeo ed Eurydice* from René Clair and, most recently, a coolly received *Boris Godunov*, whose tyro director—Losey, as it happens—had the singular idea of covering the pit and relegating the orchestra (in some respects, the leading 'performer' in *Boris*) to the depths of the cavernous Opéra stage to extend the performing area and thus bring the characters 'into close-up', a misguided shift in *musical* emphasis whose only beneficiaries were those

of opera as perceived by its audience: a vast scenic tableau dwarfing performers who occupy, at best, its lowermost third.

Losey actually appears to wish problems on himself: by decking out Anna and Elvira in campy fright wigs which must, for anyone unfamiliar with the opera, render them virtually indistinguishable (they were designed by Frantz Salieri, who is pretentiously credited, à la Christian Bérard in Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête*, with 'illustrating' the film: poor Mozart never had much luck with Salieris); by having Don Giovanni fall, not into Hell, but into a Venetian glass-blowing furnace (also weirdly located on his estate); and by setting the final mor-

alistic sextet for no fathomable reason aboard four unsteady rowing boats. But these seem as chaff compared to his decision to supplement the cast with a sultry little 'whiteamoore' played (silently) by Eric Adjani like his sister Isabelle in Octavian drag. If this orchidaceous creature is intended to symbolise a rebellious servant class passing judgment on the doomed masters (1789 and all that), there is surely no shortage of servants in Da Ponte's libretto—to begin with Leporello. And if he hints at latent homosexuality in the Don, that is the oldest critical chestnut of all Don Juans. In either case, a perpetual pout would hardly seem to be the ideal medium.

Worst for last, however: the quality of the sound recording. Overlooking the doubtful wisdom of post-synchronisation (although, if dictated by material practicalities, why not dub actors physically more suited to the roles?), it was surely fatally negligent to have maintained the same recording studio, close-to-the-microphone texture of sound throughout, while the characters go blithely trotting all over the countryside.

Comment on the specifically musical performance would require a separate review, far less blistering than this one; but fans of Maazel, Raimondi, Moser, Te Kanawa, Berganza, van Dam *et al* are well advised to buy the record. □

Alice in the City

Fingers/Richard Combs

The basic premise (and multiple *entendre* title) of *Fingers* might appear to be its greatest obstacle. Thirty-two-year-old Jimmy Angelleli (Harvey Keitel) is trying to work out a parental hang-up that has bequeathed him, on his mother's side, the ambition to become a concert pianist, and on his father's what seems to be a part-time living as a collector of illegal gambling debts. From this basic split flows his generally schizoid behaviour, expressed mainly through his divided allegiance to music. Struggling throughout the film to perfect his performance of a Bach fugue for an audition at Carnegie Hall, he also carries wherever he goes a cassette player from which pop music pours non-stop (his fingers at the same time restlessly beating a tattoo that might be on an invisible piano or on some defaulting client of his father's).

Once over this obstacle, however, the surprise of *Fingers* (Gala) is that James Toback treats his psychodramatic material in a fairly matter-of-fact way, not so much as an everyday problem of family life but certainly as an ordinary enough plot mechanism. Two early restaurant scenes with Jimmy's father (Michael V. Gazzo), the minor-league mafioso who has come to depend on his son as his enforcer, and one later with his embittered mother, withdrawn to a psychiatric home, establish without any embarrassment the family polarised between money and culture, aggression and sensitivity, violence and virtuosity.

Stylistically, the plainness of *Fingers*, the muted quality of its surfaces—even when Jimmy seems on the point of violently rupturing them—is obviously a consequence of the film being a learning experience, Toback's directorial début. But the restraint, and the somewhat baffled mood, work in the film's favour, for one thing preventing it from getting caught up in the psychoanalytic coils of *The Gambler*, which Toback wrote for Karel Reisz, about a man similarly divided as university lecturer and compulsive gambler. Also, the fact that its central, outrageous psychological ploy is absorbed as a plot device frees the film

in other ways—to explore how Jimmy's occupational schizophrenia leads to emotional and psychic splitting on various levels, and to develop his identity crisis as a kind of elaborate punning, in which the gangsterish elements are built on a morbidly playful rondo of sex, Freud and Lewis Carroll. To add preposterousness to outrage, in fact, Toback insists on treating this mixed-up New York kid—who but Keitel, unless it were Robert De Niro, the personae of both from *Mean Streets* recapitulated in Jimmy—as if he were Alice in Wonderland.

At the end of the film's very first shot, a long track into Jimmy sweating more profusely over the piano than he ever does over his debt collecting, he glances out of the window to notice a girl (Tisa Farrow) in a long sheepskin-type coat, and the next moment he is off after this White Rabbit, whose name will turn out to be Carol. The bolt-hole down which Jimmy pursues her leads him circuitously deeper into his own obsessions. Concretely enough, the centre of this topsyturvy world is the club where Carol 'works'—occupations here always mistily

involve criminality and wish-fulfilment—and which Jimmy finally penetrates to meet its piratical owner (Jim Brown), whose name will turn out to be Dreems.

Part of the 'Alice' factor here is the innocence, the lack of self-awareness with which Jimmy rushes about at the behest of his demons, the sense that he is living completely at the level of fantasy. Again, the name is a clue: Angelleli, chiming with the song 'Angel of the Morning' that accompanies Jimmy on one of his strongarm forays, suggests a man both innocent and divinely possessed. But the most important aspect of his search for self is hinted in a clutch of song titles: 'There Goes My Baby', 'Baby Talk', 'Cry Baby'. It is here that the Freudian qualities and surrealist regressions of Lewis Carroll come into play. Caught in his parental trap, Jimmy is both reduced to childishness and also, not unreasonably, unconsciously intent on regressing all the way, returning to point zero. The making/unmaking process is tied in with the urgency of his sexual demands. When he finally seduces Carol, he insists that she remove her diaphragm, and briskly enquires next morning what she is going to do with the baby they have just made.

Some Carrollian mischief almost breaks through when Jimmy goes for his audition: the concert master, an old



'Fingers': Michael V. Gazzo and Harvey Keitel.

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friend of his mother's, comments on how small Jimmy was when he last saw him, and Jimmy nervously jokes about still being small for his age. Topsy-turvy logic and identity riddles brilliantly underlie the scene where Jimmy is picked up by a policeman for carrying illegal gambling chits. Beginning what sounds like a typical line of patter to avoid arrest, Jimmy notices that the cop is Jewish and upbraids him for wasting his time with law enforcement instead of attending to culture. He then claims, apparently truthfully, that his own mother is Jewish, to which the officer cautiously responds that his mother is Italian—a parental affiliation which would make the Italianate Jimmy more Jewish than the cop named Levy. And who but Alice is the unknown little girl, who turns up only in this scene to smile beatifically on the hero, momentarily distracted from his plight by her presence.

Sex, violence and the family, however, really come into their own when Carol introduces Jimmy to Dreems. After almost rejecting the interloper from his 'club', Dreems then invites him to take part in a little ménage he has arranged

with Carol and another of his girls. Jimmy watches impassively as Dreems begins caressing both girls at once and then insists that they kiss each other. When they balk, he knocks their heads together and announces (as much to Jimmy, it seems, as to them), 'Don't you ever cross me.' In a kind of Freudian punning, Jimmy 'crosses' his parents in a double sense: he combines their personalities to the point where he is left with none of his own; and finally he fails them, flunking his Carnegie Hall audition and retreating in horror from his father's plea that he kill his chief debtor, just before the old man is himself butchered.

These last acts close in on Jimmy like a steel trap—urging him to a climax of purgative violence—which suggests that the film's model might not so much be *Mean Streets* as the deterministic *Taxi Driver*. But the strangeness of *Fingers* is reasserted finally by another track through Jimmy's apartment which finds him, stark naked, seated at his piano but staring hopelessly out of the window, until he turns to confront the camera: a man who has found his way all too completely back to his starting point? □

A Fassbinder Suicide

In a Year with 13 Moons/Martyn Auty

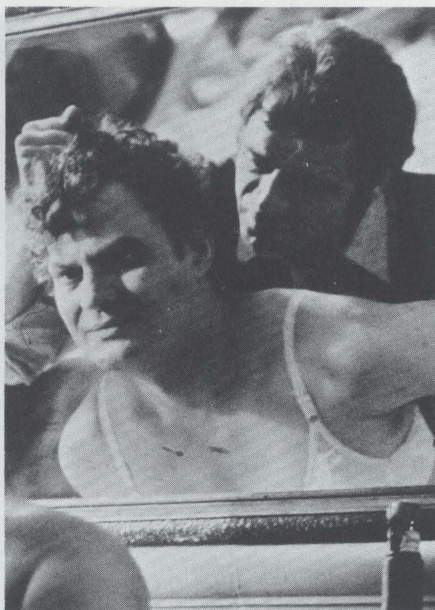
In June 1978, the mid-point of a year that contained thirteen new moons, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's ex-lover, Armin, committed suicide. Earlier that year Armin had appeared in *Germany in Autumn*; before the end of the year, Fassbinder had committed the residual anguish of his loss to film, under a title that seems to seek a rationale for the tragedy rather than betoken any astrological evangelism on his part.

In a Year with 13 Moons (Cinegate) carries all the emotional charge and polemical force of an open letter to the press. But the film is often too angry for words: in a key scene of gruesome butchery that resounds with the imagery of Auschwitz or Belsen, Fassbinder's trans-sexual protagonist Elvira (Volker Spengler) takes the young prostitute (Ingrid Caven) on a tour of the slaughterhouse where she/he once worked and fell in love with a man, Anton Saitz. As Elvira recounts the traumas of her/his childhood (orphaned, raised by nuns, turned down for adoption), her dialogue is progressively drowned out by the sounds of the slaughterhouse and by a strident, operatic music track. The pain of this experience—which led the young man Erwin to undergo an operation and become the woman Elvira—is acutely caught in the almost casual hysteria of Spengler's performance and intensified as Elvira proceeds from the humiliation of her lover's departure through successive rejections to the ultimate suicide.

Fassbinder has never fought shy of placing naked emotions at the service of his socio-sexual militancy. It is a practice which has given his work its incisive

edge, but it has also alienated many people for whom the self-orientation of his romanticism strays unpalatably close to misanthropy. It scarcely needs emphasising that this is one of Fassbinder's most intensely personal films—indeed his name appears against every technical credit in the opening titles—and the way he allows instinctive emotions to determine the structure of the narrative lends it a raw immediacy not found in the restrained, more 'art'-conscious *mise en scène* of his previous film *The Marriage of Maria Braun*.

If Fassbinder's is a cinema of victims—Petra von Kant, the Merchant, Fox,



Tormented Volker Spengler.

Maria Braun—then Elvira (the name itself a sick echo of the archetypal doomed romantic heroine Elvira Madigan) is surely his most tragic loser since, unlike her predecessors, she fails to score from the start. The opening sequence of the film, with its ironic evocation of *Death in Venice* as Elvira seeks sexual gratification on the night-time city street to the accompaniment of Mahler's plangent tones, ends with her public humiliation followed by the private agony of her return home to discover her lover, Christoph, packing his case. Thereafter, except for the companionship of Zora (the prostitute who will eventually seduce Anton Saitz on Elvira's bed, oblivious to her suicide), Elvira is successively rejected by Sister Gudrun (the nun who raised him), Saitz (the one-time lover turned property tycoon), Irene (the former wife of Erwin/Elvira) and even the journalist to whom she had recounted her history in a magazine interview. Elvira's impulse to visit the reclusive Saitz is an ingenuous but hopeless gesture that only serves to open the old wound through which Saitz will screw her, figuratively speaking.

The encounter with Saitz and his henchmen, preceded by a grimly comic scene of an anonymous suicide in the mezzanine of one of Saitz's empty tower blocks, is a key to the political undertow of the film. As Elvira is admitted to the Saitz suite, the group of men are watching a Dean Martin-Jerry Lewis movie on TV. The slim, sub-Aryan Saitz is dressed in tennis shorts, bouncing a ball with one eye on the screen; suddenly, he orders the whole group to copy the Martin and Lewis parade-ground routine. From the moment that Elvira joins in this grotesque evocation of *Triumph of the Will*, participates step for step in the triumphal march of the neo-fascists, she unwittingly resigns her right to defend herself as an oppressed minority.

Desperation takes over from despair. The pace of the film quickens as Elvira makes the wrong moves too late in the day. Cutting her hair and dressing in a man's suit, she pays a rare visit to Irene; the scene is in medium shot and ends abruptly as Elvira rushes away impulsively. Fassbinder's camera picks her up again climbing a shadowy spiral staircase to the journalist's apartment; a few brief close-ups are exchanged as the journalist cold shoulders her; moments later, back in her own flat, Elvira is seen in long shot slumped on the bed. Her social alienation is complete and is matched by the careful distanciation of the *mise en scène*.

Whether Elvira/Erwin's suicide may be, to use Fassbinder's own words, 'found acceptable' depends on the film's capacity for evincing and sustaining sympathy for a protagonist who teeters dangerously close to pathos yet, at times, risks being found tedious. That the same may be said of Fassbinder is not to belittle the rough-hewn achievement of *In a Year with 13 Moons*, merely to call attention to the suicidal tendencies occasionally reflected in the forms and structures of his work. □



Homeless in Missouri

The Long Riders/John Pym

The discords of the Civil War echo through *The Long Riders* (United Artists), the latest Western to recast the history of Frank and Jesse James and their uneasy partnership with the Younger brothers. Walter Hill, the director and uncredited co-scriptwriter, maintains, however, an uncharacteristically neutral tone: our sympathies are not edged behind the Rebel gang, although we are made to see the remorseless acts of the pursuing Pinkerton men from the gang's point of view; and Jacob Rixley, the Northern city-bred leader of the Pinkertons, has at times, despite a faintly reptilian manner, a quality of unvengeful courtliness.

Hill and his photographer Ric Waite paint the essence of their dark universe with a few broad strokes: rural Missouri, an armed funeral party winding up an incline, in the background a desolate expanse of barely populated hills. Everyone, it seems, is locked into his destiny, the Pinkertons just as blindly as the Jameses and the Youngers. It is the aftermath of defeat: the junior Younger, Bob, did not fight for 'the Stars and Bars', but is if anything more fiercely, irrationally patriotic for the South than the other members of the blood-linked confederacy. But patriotic for what? The future in the Ozarks appears only to hold a sort of despairing nullity.

The unadorned narrative, which began as a stage musical, starring the film's originator James Keach, before passing through the refining hands of several other scriptwriters, proceeds mainly by opening a succession of windows on the gang's exploits and their consequences. The robbing of an anonymous bank; the tit-for-tat pursuit of the Pinkertons; the hold-up of the Rock Island train; the ambush of the gang in a farm building, their escape and split-up; and, later, the final disastrous raid on Northfield, Minnesota, the capture of the Youngers,

and the death of Jesse by the gun of the duplicitous Bob Ford.

The thrust of this essentially motiveless and sometimes symbolically unrealistic narrative, however, is not towards an explanation of the gang's disintegration. The Pinkerton set-up at Northfield, for example, simply occurs, though there are, as in any self-respecting Western, several unmistakable intimations of the closing trap. Rixley (James Whitmore Jr.) is content to sit and—as he tells the journalist who needs a narrative explanation for his paper—wait for the gang to come home to him. What unifies the film is its tonal shading: its existential sense of characters still managing to function, in a limbo of doomed conscienceless 'normality', in the only way they understand ('We started robbing banks and we just kept going').

This treatment of bandit morality is, of course, a Western staple. Despite the well-worn material (and the consciously derivative fashion in which some of it is presented—it is not for nothing that the scriptwriter of *The Getaway* evinces an admiration for Peckinpah), Hill nevertheless proves that it is still possible to extract renewed life from such conventions as the unifying image of the family hearth: Jesse returns home at dusk after the split-up and his wife is framed on the porch rocking-chair by the warm light of the open front door. (It may be noted that Ry Cooder's distinctive score, which itself adapts and reinvigorates Western themes, is deployed in haunting counterpoint to the conjuring of family ties.) And that also it is still deceptively easy to touch the spectator's heart, as in the sequence when Jesse prepares to ford the torrent separating Minnesota from Missouri and declares that if only he can get home he will found another gang, and Frank responds with melancholy bitterness that they should never have left Missouri in the first place.

The historical James-Youngers are not what interest Hill: indeed, along with much else, the final sequence in which Frank—who was, in reality, never convicted and later settled into the blameless life of a farmer—surrenders to Rixley in order that he can bury his brother is pure poetic licence. Rather it is the conjuring—that old conjuring—of courageous, heartless bad men. Hill's central resonant motif is of the closing of ranks, against the defeats of the past and the hardly understood perils of the future. Change looms, perhaps a shade too familiarly, in the Northfield sequence: a traction-engine chugs outside the bank; a Swede in a stovepipe hat, the very antithesis of the bandits, one of whom derisively characterises the townspeople as 'squareheads', jingles a bag of money and jabbars incomprehensibly in an attempt to buy one of the gang's horses.

The film casts four sets of brothers: Nicholas and Christopher Guest, as Bob and Charlie Ford; David, Keith and Robert Carradine, as Coleman, Jim and Bob Younger; Dennis and Randy Quaid, as Ed and Clell Miller (the former being expelled from the gang after a gratuitous killing during the opening raid, and the latter dying after having performed a similarly thoughtless murder during the Northfield hold-up); and James and Stacy Keach, as Jesse and Frank James.

The camera, in different ways, loves all these brothers. The dour, maniacally long-faced James Keach has the inner presence of the leader of a gang of desperadoes; Stacy the physical solidity of a steady right-hand man. The Carradines, with Robert very much the pup ('The Jameses ride with the Youngers,' he snaps at the engineer of the Rock Island train who enquires whether he is being held up by the James Gang), look very much like camp-followers: they look like hippies. Interestingly, Randy Quaid does not, on the surface, closely resemble his brother; and when he is called upon to choose between the gang or his family, this fact somehow makes his decision to stick with his surrogate family all the more plausible. The Guests exude the dispiriting air of twitchy losers.

The obverse side of the theme of the family as a bastion against the ravages of poverty, city ways, the North, is the film's demonstration of its fragility. It is really only an idea: the protection of the Youngers' and the Jameses' kin is only temporary (in Hill's terms at least); the moments of peace the men find with their women only transitory. In the end, Jesse is gunned down in his home, as he straightens a framed sampler, by men who are his guests as well as the genesis of his 'new gang'. Family is only family for the burying of the dead. The Youngers, all grievously wounded, and abandoned by the James brothers, refuse to betray their former partners not out of loyalty but as a last wayward attempt to reaffirm their own identity. □

Philly's Family

Best Boy/David Robinson

Best Boy (Essential) is a documentary about three people. One is Philip Wohl—Philly—a plump, balding, gap-toothed man of 52 with a mental age of five. The others are his father, who died while the film was being made; and his mother, whom we watch growing older and frailer and who, a title informs us, died a few months after the film was completed. Knowing this much, it is hard to anticipate the quality of the film, which is cheerful, kind, tough, funny, above all optimistic; never defeated or dispiriting. The irresistible effect is to leave the spectator at least a shade more hopeful.

The secret of its strength, maybe, is that Ira Wohl, though he is a film-maker, in this instance did not set out deliberately to make a film. He simply meant to do something for Philly, who is his cousin. Then it seemed natural and interesting to record some of the things that happened (though he had no budget, begged or borrowed 16mm stock, and for months had no money to print the material already shot). The social function of the filming process, the presence of the three-man crew, became part of what Ira was doing for Philly, and an accepted part of Philly's environment. The film that Ira Wohl was making was not, and is not, a *show*, so much as a *relationship* linking a group of people.

Ira Wohl, he confesses, had hardly noticed Philly as he had grown up, except as someone in the background; his mind, he recalled being told, had stopped growing when he was five. Then one day, at a family party, shock at the disrespect of another relation in telling Philly to shut up set him thinking about Philly's problems. Apart from a brief, unhappy spell in a home at a period when he had become self-destructive, Philly had lived all his life in the care of his parents Max and Pearl. Now they were nearly eighty and growing feeble. No one till Ira had considered the future.

The film shows how, with Pearl's slightly anxious approval, Ira takes Philly in hand, takes him for psychiatric tests

(‘He is very slow. Otherwise he’s normal’); takes him on outings, enrolls him in a day centre for the handicapped. Philly expands, comes out of himself, radiates. Meanwhile old Max becomes more silent and sick and eventually dies. The hardest part and the greatest responsibility for Ira is to persuade Pearl that she will not live for ever, that the time has come for Philly to make the break, to go into a residential centre. Poor Pearl: when Philly joyously agrees, there is a glimpse of all the jealous protectiveness of a good Jewish mother—‘Well... remember... you said it...’

Twenty filming sessions spanned some three years and all the crucial episodes of the revolution in the life of Philly and his family. The portraits that emerge are all the more intimate and penetrating because they are illuminated through a family relationship that is at once classical and complex. The film even manages to afford some glimpses behind the taciturn protective dignity of Max, suffering the onset of debility and death as privately as, it may be sensed, he has shared the difficulties of his handicapped son. Pearl is able to externalise much more; in any case her care for Philly has been only an endless prolongation of any mother's concern: she treats his first day at school as if he really were five years old. As we watch her failing physically Pearl's everyday courage grows, to the heroic moment of her decision to part with Philly, her last companion. But the overwhelming optimism of the film derives from Philly himself, and the spectacle of his tiny but majestic social and intellectual growth. Slightly withdrawn at first, he quickly shows himself a singularly amiable and cheerful man, ready to accept every new person and every new experience with happiness and—as he learns such wisdom as how to cross the road or buy ice-cream unaided—infectious excitement.

I have suggested that the film is in itself a *relationship* among the people, and it is this that removes every sense of the voyeurism that tends to hover over

even the most honourable films about personal misfortunes and handicaps. The camera and the men behind it belong, with Ira himself, to the family. Pearl confides her most private thoughts: ‘You boys understand...’ Philly, unabashed, peers with mild curiosity into the camera lens and welcomes the very companionship of the paraphernalia. When he goes adventuring, on his first day at school, it is evidently comforting to have these friends along. Perhaps the most touching moment in the film, and the clearest revelation of the directness and purity of the connections between Philly and the film-makers, is where Philly absently draws the hand of the sound man into the frame, to hold it and stroke it for reassurance.

There is no difficulty in believing that the film records truthfully what happened. Ira Wohl confesses that when he actually tried to influence or set up a scene it generally went wrong. Recording is one thing: selection and editing another. Here again Wohl's judgment cannot be faulted. There is in the film no detectable error either of evasion or of indiscretion. Again perhaps because this was in a way a spontaneous phenomenon, rather than an act of creation deliberately entered on, the film excludes any possibility of intrusion or impertinence. It exposes, simply and naturally, the nobility of very ordinary people facing life and death in the best way they know.

There is a postscript to the film, apart from its Academy Award as Best Documentary. Pearl lived to see the film, with Philly, at the New York Film Festival. They both liked it. Philly especially enjoyed seeing his father again. Pearl cried; Philly laughed. Afterwards Pearl, it is reported, delighted in the role of everybody's mother and in the people who clustered around her for advice. Philly happily rushed up and down after the show giving autographs and announcing, ‘I'm the Best Boy’. Pearl died seven months later. Philly still enjoys the residential centre, gets brighter every day, and from time to time visits Ira. □



'Best Boy': Philip and Ira Wohl.

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A to . . .

CINEMA: A CRITICAL DICTIONARY

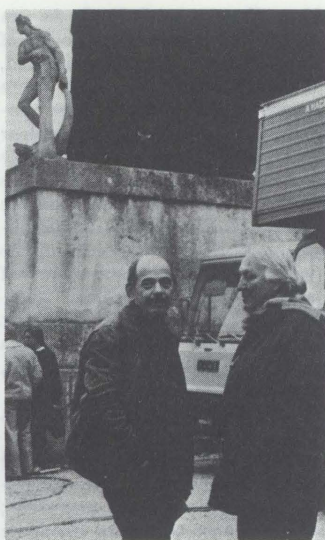
edited by Richard Roud

Secker & Warburg/£25 (2 vols)

In the past decade and a half I have written articles for two projected dictionaries or encyclopaedias of the cinema, neither of which was ultimately published. Richard Roud is therefore to be congratulated on the appearance at last of the two volumes under review (the dictionary is subtitled 'The Major Film-Makers'), particularly as they contain much excellent critical writing by the editor and his diverse team of contributors, writing, moreover, that makes one desire to turn or return to the films analysed.

However, the traces of an over-long gestation period are all too apparent. Early in his introduction, the editor describes: 'Both the choice of those included and the amount of space devoted to each' as 'a personal evaluation from the vantage point of the late 70s' (p. 1). Later, however, he writes of 'the end of 1975' as 'in many, but not all cases' the 'final cut-off' for the account of 'important recent developments in the careers of the film-makers' (p. 19) that he has appended to many articles. In fact, the dictionary's first entry (Andrew Sarris on Robert Aldrich) ends with *The Grissom Gang* (1971); Roud briefly updates it to *Hustle* (1975). Robin Wood's entry on Altman ends with *California Split* (1974); Roud updates it to *Three Women* (1977). Richard Corliss' account of American Cinema of the 70s and Roud's updating both refer to films made in 1977. Discussion of the American avant-garde, however, ends with 1971, and there is no mention of the contemporary British avant-garde, in any of its manifestations. While, of course, the local London Know-Nothings are disturbed by the idea that Hanoun, and shocked by the idea that Snow may be 'major film-makers', the account of the avant-garde in these two volumes, effective and welcome though it is, remains within what are by now fairly orthodox and conservative parameters. Moreover, a dictionary that claims to offer an account as seen 'from the vantage point of the late 70s' while ignoring the challenge that British landscape and structuralist-materialist film-making offers to several dominant and alternative notions of filmic art presents a pretty limited picture of what, at least in London, is of contemporary 'interest and importance' (p. 1).

Of even more urgency and interest, however, is the work of both Latin American and African film-makers. Apart from brief ref-



Richard Roud with Joseph Losey at the Villa Rotonda.

erences to Buñuel in Mexico and Cavalcanti in Brazil, and considerably less than a page on Glauber Rocha (who, whatever his limitations, seems to this writer a rather more interesting film-maker than Satyajit Ray, granted here nearly 18 pages, including stills!), both are totally ignored. Thus, there is no discussion of some of the most remarkable achievements of post-World War II cinema: Ruy Guerra's *Os Fuzis* (The Guns, 1964); Alea's *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* (Memories of Underdevelopment, 1968); Solás' *Lucia* (1969); the documentaries of Alvarez; Solanas' *La Hora de los Hornos* (The Hour of the Furnaces, 1968). No mention of the work of Med Hondo or Ousmane Sembene, who even before his remarkable *Ceddo* (1976, too late for inclusion?) seemed at the very least the equal of De Sica as a film-maker. While it is true that Solás' subsequent *Cantata di Chile* is flawed by its thematic and formal over-ambition as much as Alea's subsequent work is by formal and thematic conservatism, their respective masterpieces remain extraordinary works, great films by any standards. This, of course, may be part of the problem: Richard Roud seems suspicious, if not contemptuous, of the isolated great film. Thus, he is happy to describe one of the most remarkable works of silent cinema, Kinugasa's *Kurutta Ippei* (A Page of Madness), as an 'overrated curiosity'.

Of course, when challenged, Roud can retreat to the sanctuary of the formulation 'personal evaluation'. This is fair enough in a critic; indeed, Roud's admission of his 'blind spots—Eisenstein, Murnau, Mizoguchi, Rossellini and Bergman' (p. 3) is refreshing in its honesty. However, some of his editorial comments seem rather less honest: 'the vantage point of the late 70s' seems, in fact, to refer to a selection of film-makers to write about and writers to undertake the task made about 1970 (as I think is demonstrated

by typical examples cited earlier).

Noël Burch is taken to task for suggesting that Eisenstein's attitudes 'offer an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the young film-makers of today'; whereas, Roud argues, 'when political film-makers like Godard have sought inspiration in the Soviet cinema, it is towards Dziga Vertov or Medvedkin that they have turned' (p. 328). In fact, Burch links the names of Vertov and Eisenstein in his article on the latter (p. 315) and has explicitly indicated his admiration for the exemplary work of Vertov in published works Roud refers to elsewhere in the dictionary. Conversely, Medvedkin is referred to only here and in the entry on Marker (p. 669) in relation to SLON's *Le Train en Marche* (1971), made to introduce *Schastye* (Happiness, 1934). Neither *Schastye* nor Medvedkin appear in the index, nor is there any attempt to indicate why they might be of interest to recent political film-makers, while *Happiness* is a 1924 film by King Vidor. Vertov does, in fact, rate a major essay, which is unusual, in this work, for a prominent documentarian (Joris Ivens is mentioned twice, but his work effectively ignored; Jennings does not rate an entry, but is granted one accurate but insultingly brief paragraph in the entry on the British Documentary Movement).

Indeed, Roud's little editorial glosses (such as that on Burch on Eisenstein) are the weakest part of the book. At their worst, they seem like attempts to efface the radical implications of the texts they refer to, and reduce everything to a matter of personal opinion and subjectivity. Thus: 'Perhaps because of the vagueness of the "poetic" label which most critics have attached to Dovzhenko's name, Sitney has possibly over-stressed Dovzhenko's "language of cinematic symbolism"'. For it is precisely this symbolism that many today find the most unattractive element in Soviet cinema because of its manipulatory crudeness. I am one of those, and because of this I find *Ivan*, for example, superior to *Aerograd* (p. 290). And: 'There is little point, however, in expanding on the differences of opinion between Burch and myself; readers will have their own views' (p. 315). Now it may well be that Sitney or Burch exaggerate the importance of the formal strategies they locate and describe in their essays on, say, Dovzhenko, Dreyer, Eisenstein, Lang, but they do draw attention to features that have an objective, demonstrable textual existence, and sometimes argue a convincing case for their perceptual and psychological importance. This case is succinctly stated by Jean-André Fieschi when invoking 'Eisenstein's dialectical requirements (which distinguished the living from the dead work in that

the living one "draws the spectator along in the course of its evolution" instead of "presenting for his attention the results of a creative process already complete")'. The case to be answered, one that Roud, whose perspective on Soviet cinema seems more that of the late 50s or early 60s, seems either to ignore or not understand, is that the apparently humanist work which conceals its operations and mechanisms rather than revealing them is the truly manipulative work, and possibly dangerous.

Roud's glosses seem, further, to deny what is most radical and ambitious about the book he has edited: 'The very list of names is a testimony to the eclectic critical bias of the work . . . my aim has been to choose a writer who is in sympathy with the work he (sic) is discussing' (p. 19). But deep sympathies, provoking and provoked by comprehensive analysis, will inevitably produce conflict, confrontation and controversy, the implications of which should be explored, not avoided. Similarly, depth of critical insight and passion about its implications may preclude certain kinds of critical tolerance and acceptance. This is what Burch's 'crest line' or Leavis' 'great tradition' imply, dissimilar though their argued critical criteria may be. (Roud, by the way, seems unaware—p. 2-3—that in 1970 F.R. and Q.D. Leavis retracted from their former partial rejection of the novels of Dickens, but in the critically most meaningful manner: as a result of the development, extension and re-application of their previous insights, and not the rejection of their basic critical engagement.) Finally, to suggest that the beauties and pleasures of *Gertrude* are more diverse and complex, more radically satisfying, than those of *Wild Strawberries* or *Rio Bravo* is not necessarily to deny oneself enjoyment of the latter, though it may be the first step on a long march towards a critique of the mainstream narrative cinema that produced them.

While a diversity of opinion has been solicited, the implications of this diversity remain unexplored. Moreover, vast lacunae exist in the range of material selected for discussion, lacunae that cannot be explained away by disarming invocations of personal subjectivity, another concept nowhere explored or examined. Perhaps wisely so, because such examination might reveal a strand of profound conservatism and complacency in an editor who can write 'The presence of Robert Kramer and the absence of Stanley Kramer from this Dictionary are not accidental' (p. 560), yet devote a section to contemporary Swiss cinema while ignoring post-revolutionary Cuban cinema. Sad, though, because such an exploration would have made this valuable book so much better.

JAMES LEAHY

The Debate on Realism

REALISM AND THE CINEMA

edited by Christopher Williams

Routledge & Kegan Paul in association with the BFI/
£10.00 (Paperback £4.95)

'Stories taken from the raw can be finer (more real in the philosophical sense) than the acted article.' What precisely Grierson meant by 'in the philosophical sense' is obscure, but the quotation is an important one and Christopher Williams very appropriately uses the passage in which it occurs to introduce a discussion of realist positions. Today the mantle of Grierson has been accepted by the television organisations, whose programme heads can be heard to argue from time to time that documentary films, because of their directness, their ability to capture reality, are unequivocally truthful mirrors of the world in which we live. Others are more sceptical. There is Jean-Louis Comolli of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, for example, who in the section of Christopher Williams' reader devoted to aesthetics and ideology attacks the conventional view of documentary as hypocritical, denies the claim that 'there is an antimony between direct cinema and aesthetic manipulation' and suggests that those who make it are the victims of 'illusory honesty, non-intervention and humility'.

Not that the debate, as is evident from the texts reproduced in the reader, is confined to documentary. The use of realism in narrative film has also been called in question, together with the nature of that—to some dubious—experience to which we as film-goers surrender when the lights go down and the great screen sucks us into its unreal realistic world. The argument over narrative film links up with the great debate on realism conducted by Lukacs and Brecht—an argument in which others joined: Zhdanov, for instance, at the Soviet Writers' Congress of 1934 when he spoke of the need to know life 'so as to be able to depict it truthfully—not in a dead scholastic way—not simply as "objective reality"'. The political dimension of the debate is still with us. There is a sense, for instance, in which the realism of the television documentary and of the narrative film is as important for the perpetuation of the dominant ideology of our society as socialist realism was for the Stalinist regime and is still for the countries—to use Bahro's term—of 'actually existing socialism'.

Today the question of realism is one that divides conventional film-makers (whether they work in documentary or narrative) from what can be succinctly described as the avant-garde—a term which lumps together a number of different tendencies. What the latter frequently share is a dominant intellectual strain derived from Althusser's Marxism as applied to film theory. Williams cites Jean-Paul Fargier of *Cinétique* as a spokesman of this tendency—one which has numerous adherents in Britain. His is an important text, for in it he formulates the 'decisive rule' that 'in cinema the communication of knowledge is attendant on the production of knowledge about the cinema.'

The significance of the text is twofold: on the one hand, it explains the work aimed at 'deconstructing' both narrative and documentary, the laying bare of the mechanisms of film-making, the denial of transparency to the medium; on the other, it makes it clear why so much of what is described by its authors as subversive film-making is not manifestly political. The reason, according to Fargier, is that while a strike is a political weapon 'a film about a strike is not for a film is only a weapon in its own area, "which is not about politics"'. This is a view which can be traced to Althusser's distinction between the various forms of practice in society and his assertion of their relative independence. It has the advantage, some might say, of allowing intellectuals and film-makers to busy themselves with 'theoretical' and 'signifying' practices—choosing their favourite part of Althusser's layer-cake—and to disregard the web of relationships, economic, political, ideological, in which we as social beings are necessarily caught up. It is a theory which, when applied to film-making, can, as Williams comments, lead 'not to anything that we can reasonably call "knowledge" but rather to a new and more sophisticated form of aesthetic fascination.' One of the cheering aspects of some recent avant-garde film-making is that more practitioners are beginning to realise that their work need not scorn social relevance.

One of the problems about the debate on realism—and indeed other more esoteric debates about the experience of watching films—is that, although confident statements are made about the audience, we know very little about 'the general demands viewers make of the film medium or the specific response they have to it.' What would we not give to know, for instance, what the Soviet audiences made of Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*. Did they see it as an elaborate trick film? As a portrait of a composite city, compounded of shots from Moscow, Odessa and Kiev? As a criticism of the

New Economic Policy? As an attack on conventional codes of film-making? What is needed, Williams points out, is a more developed sociology of the cinema, for it is by no means clear how the audience 'uses' narrative or what degree of credence it gives to the reality of the events on the screen. In this respect the application to cinema audiences of the 'uses and gratifications' theory of audience research which, whatever its shortcomings, has cast light on how television viewers use the product of that medium, might be helpful.

Traditional liberal high culture, Williams reminds us, has conspired with Marxist-influenced modernism to resist 'the swamp-like fascination of the narrative'; and certainly there are members of the avant-garde who, like Plato, would banish all storytellers because they deal in lies. Williams, on the other hand, believes that 'the pleasures narrative methods provide need to be recognised ... rather than deplored or condescended to.' Perhaps it is significant in this connection that at the recent BFI summer school the question of 'pleasure' kept cropping up. It is after all one of the marks of Brecht's greatness that he could combine narrative pleasure with the A(lienation)-Effect and that he could admit—in a little-quoted essay—that in some circumstances Aristotelean drama involving empathy can be as effective as epic theatre.

Christopher Williams has contributed an important addition to the BFI series of readers in film studies. His material is well chosen and well presented; it ranges from the Russians—Eisenstein, Vertov, Tretyakov and Shklovsky—through Bazin and the Italian neo-realists to Jean Epstein, Renoir and Eric Rohmer, with other more familiar figures in between. It is a book which will be a valuable addition to reading lists for courses on film theory and on communications studies.

STUART HOOD

A Renoir primer

JEAN RENOIR: The French Films, 1924-1937
by Alexander Sesonske

Harvard University Press/\$9.95

In the preface to this massive volume, one's eye is arrested by the following remarkable assertion: Renoir's films were 'until quite recently ... almost completely ignored by film historians writing in English'; and further 'I am not dismayed that my work can no longer pretend to introduce the films of Jean Renoir to Americans, as I once thought it

might.' In fact, the project was embarked on all of eleven years ago, its early stages coinciding with the preparation of a Renoir retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and the reader would perhaps be best advised to take his cue from the author himself and judge the result as a primer, albeit a densely argued one.

Therein, however, lies the root of the problem: Who is the reader? For those of us whose experience of Renoir's work has been refined over the years by exposure to a quite voluminous body of criticism (pace Professor Sesonske), it's rather like suffering an elaborate introduction to someone with whom one is already on an intimate footing; while those for whom the study seems primarily designed—students, presumably, and 'laymen' in general—may find the dauntingly close textual readings more than they can comfortably digest at a single sitting (e.g. in his analysis of a single brief segment of the hunt sequence in *La Règle du Jeu* Sesonske catalogues the length, in seconds, of seventeen consecutive shots, which looks on the page like this: '6,6, 15,2,2,2,4,4,5,18,3-5,4,4-5,4,3,8').

Besides which, neither sociological, auteurist, semiological or genre insights swim into Sesonske's ken: he blithely ignores the continuing debate over the value of these methodologies in favour of such outmoded critical categorisations as Treatment, Style and Form, and Characterisation—inhibitive for the films of any major director, these prove positively counter-productive in the case of a career as unselfconsciously radical as Renoir's. I never quite grasped the distinction being made between the former two, and his conception of Characterisation, rooted almost exclusively in 'well-rounded' bourgeois psychology, predictably makes little headway with manifestations as *sui generis* as Catherine Hessling and *La Nuit du Carrefour* (Pierre Renoir's Maigret 'remains, as it were, a fictional person and not, therefore, to be included among the characters we find most memorable among the Renoir creations of the thirties'—my italics).

Sesonske's imagination appears cramped throughout by his taste for works whose illusionist reflection of 'reality', as he sees it, is as seamless as humanly possible: the protagonists of *La Chienne* and *Boudu Sauvê des Eaux* 'seem as real as life', whereas the very moot question of whether Toni's dialogue might be over-literary is swiftly resolved by the casual claim that 'the least literate people often speak in "literary" phrases.' Well, yes and no ...

This said, however, Sesonske's *Jean Renoir* is in many respects a valuable study, of use to any scholar for its shot-by-shot analyses of key scenes and

BOOK REVIEWS

expositions of films which have particularly engaged the author's enthusiasm (those of *Boudu* and *La Règle du Jeu* are models of lucidity). Though vulgar passion never ruffles his even professorial tone, Sesonke is also a stranger to anything remotely resembling *délire d'interprétation*, and reading him on *La Grande Illusion*, for example, is the next best thing to seeing the film (for the researcher, that is).

GILBERT ADAIR

Hollywood gangsters

BORN TO LOSE: THE GANGSTER FILM IN AMERICA

by Eugene Rosow

Oxford University Press/
£10.75

The best thing about *Born to Lose*, its copious selection of stills material, begins with famous photographs of Billy the Kid and Jesse James and ends with images of an atomic bomb explosion and Robert Kennedy dying. Its historical, political and sociological account of the gangster genre in Hollywood ranges as far and wide as this would suggest. And despite some tenuous connections and uncertain prose ('... military spending has resulted in an arsenal of destruction fully deserving of the darkest dreams and the most nightmarish and negative dimensions of American culture that the gangster represents' justifies the A-bomb photo), Eugene Rosow seems confidently in command of both the scope and the extra-cinematic implications of his project. Individual films, unfortunately, are little more than grist to his prodigious social-scientific mill, and what he says about *Little Caesar* or *Scarface* or *The Godfather* never goes much beyond listing their tribal resemblances.

This is slightly unfair, in that the stylistic flourishes, generic content and auteurist inflections of these films have already been exhaustively covered in a variety of sources. But Rosow also spends a lot of time, trying to evoke the spirit (the stars, the stories, the visual style) of these films. And too often he produces the kind of literal reading that passes for visual analysis—'In *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), the first American Western, the gang stops the train of America's onrushing industrial future as if to thwart the destruction of rural, pre-industrial America'—or even more ludicrous links between content and context: 'America was "cleansed" by the removal of thousands of radicals [after World War I], as *The Buzzard* [Lon Chaney in *The Penalty*, 1921] was

reformed when a blood clot was removed from his brain.'

The book is altogether more comfortable when it forgoes helping us to 'see' in order to investigate the economic origins of the genre (and Hollywood), the historical circumstances of its popular ascendancy in the 30s, and the political context of its continued development since then. One or two ideas stand out: the uneasy combination of Robber Baron and Robin Hood in the gangster image which explains the schizophrenic way the American 'Myth of Success' has been accommodated by economic reality, the popular fascination with criminals, and perhaps the abiding streak of criminality which the author worries about in society at large. Most fascinating is the kind of circular equation by which Rosow links gangster films as metaphors for the economic circumstances of their making with the methods of the movie moguls and the activities of real-life gangsters.

This theme might have been explored via the contradictions of *The Godfather*, for instance, but Rosow instead apostrophises that film simply as 'the most successful and expensive gangster movie ever produced ... a gangster soap opera on a grand scale ... a monumental testimonial to the enduring popularity of gangster movies in America.' The wide-ranging researches, in other words, never permeate analysis of the films themselves, but are presented rather (arguably no less interestingly) as anecdotal material: George Raft's friendship with 'Bugsy' Siegel; Mark Hellinger's gangster connections and cultivated gangster appearance; industry watchdog Will Hays' use of mobsters for union-breaking in Hollywood.

Instructive and entertaining as much of the book is, there is no structural bridge between its subjective enthusiasm for many of the films mentioned and its objective assessment that '... over the years, the gangster genre has not presented a thorough and accurate picture of the range and methods of underworld activities in America.' The author asserts that 'The noted "realism" of the gangster genre is more apparent than real; it is a matter of style rather than of substance.' But it might have been more worthwhile to explore what is meant by that 'realism' than to compile lists of what one might expect to find in gangster films ('punching, kicking, scratching, biting, slicing, chopping, whipping, beating, stabbing, impaling, burning, shooting and exploding'). An early pictorial contrast is strikingly made between the horizontal world of the Western and the gangster's vertical urban environment. *Born to Lose*, ironically, has great horizontal reach but only haphazard vertical growth.

RICHARD COMBS

Findings

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM ENCYCLOPEDIA

by Ephraim Katz

Macmillan/£15.00

Which former ice-skater married a studio boss? Easy, Vera Ralston. But which ice-skater finished second to Sonja Henie in the 1936 Olympics? Well, that was Vera Ralston too. Such information is typical of the *trouvailles* (intriguing to learn that the comedian Ronald Shiner was once a Canadian Mountie) which make this hefty but reasonably priced compendium the cinéophile's ideal bedside book.

But there's more to it than that. Ephraim Katz, the encyclopedia's only begetter, writes in his introduction of having sought to please 'both the film scholar and the movie fan' (though these are surely not mutually exclusive categories) and the 1,200-plus pages that follow go some way toward making his claim unassailable. Allowing for an understandable bias toward European and especially American cinema, the range of reference—terminological as well as personal—is some-

times astonishingly wide and thorough, sufficiently so to make citation of specific absences (though of course there are some) look like nit-picking.

As a counsel of perfection, it might be objected that a fair proportion of the entries include only selective film listings, but such a complaint scarcely withstands practical scrutiny. One might, however, more reasonably cavil at the occasional intrusion of evaluative judgments and the attendant danger of their being written into the record. Would there, for instance, be any consensus that Simone Signoret gave 'one of the best performances of her career' in *Madame Rosa*? Again, the encapsulated surveys of assorted national cinemas sometimes risk appearing rather breathlessly irrelevant: the one on Australia is brusque well beyond the point of discourtesy.

Any reference work will in the nature of things be somewhat out of date by the time it reaches print. But one is struck in this case by a melancholy awareness of the number of individuals listed whose deaths have intervened between compilation and publication. The fact is, perhaps, that the generation upon whom, above any other, movies as a mass medium creatively depended is today fast diminishing.

TIM PULLEINE

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LETTERS

West German Television

SIR,—The proposal of the CDU to break up NDR to which we referred in our article in *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Summer 1980, has been forestalled by a judgment of the Federal Administrative Court in Berlin, delivered on 28 May 1980.

In June 1978, the CDU *Minister-Präsident* of Schleswig-Holstein, Gerhard Stoltenberg, gave notice of cancellation of the *Inter-Land* agreement that governs NDR. This was echoed by the *Minister-Präsident* of Lower Saxony, Ernst Albrecht, who stated 'It would give me pleasure to reshape the whole German broadcasting system through NDR' (*Financial Times*, 28 May 1980). It is this initiative based on the dissolution of NDR but aimed at overturning the ARD system that the Federal Administrative Court has forestalled. NDR will continue, at least until 1985, although Schleswig-Holstein may unilaterally secede from the *Inter-Land* agreement before then, but without effective power to challenge the continued existence of NDR.

According to the *Financial Times* (4 June 1980), the major CDU actors in the drama, Albrecht and Stoltenberg, are likely to achieve cabinet rank in a CDU/CSU government headed by Franz Josef Strauss, although the leader of the CDU, Helmut Kohl, would be denied a cabinet post should Strauss become Chancellor after the Federal elections in October 1980.

Yours faithfully,
RICHARD COLLINS
VINCENT PORTER

Polytechnic of Central London

From Silence to Sound

SIR,—Reading the article by Kevin Brownlow on the speed of silent films (*SIGHT AND SOUND*, Summer 1980) brings back to me a particularly trying experience during the period of changing over from silence to sound. Cinemas were trying to keep going, managers were looking for the moment when the cheaper silent film ceased to attract a big enough audience to make a profit and they could risk the cost of installing sound equipment and the chance of appealing to a larger audience at increased prices.

I was the first film editor to be employed by Welsh-Pearson-Elder after the passing of the first Film Quota Act had increased the demand for British films, taking over from George Pearson who had previously had plenty of time to edit his own films. (There had been no film editors in Britain and they cost a fortune in Hollywood.) Pearson was a splendid teacher, and finding the way in the cutting room was an absorbing job. Pearson longed to go over to sound films and persuaded the company to put the music-hall



Harry Lauder in 'Auld Lang Syne' (see Thorold Dickinson's letter).

singer Sir Harry Lauder under contract. Though his first film was silent, Pearson filmed Lauder singing six of his most popular songs, which were circulated by His Master's Voice singly on ten-inch records. He then invited the Paramount Corporation of the USA to buy the distribution rights, which they agreed to do, but only if the songs were sung on the soundtrack in synchronisation. The rest of the film could be silent with music and sound effects but...

It was too late to anticipate any profit on a Lauder film with the songs unsynchronised anyway, and successful synchronisation would mean wide bookings throughout the English-speaking world. So we started. The sound engineers at Stoll Studios, Cricklewood, synchronised a portable gramophone with a Moviola running at synchronised sound speed. And the very efficient chap in charge of the optical printer at the laboratory made a new negative of all the shots in which Lauder sang. They had been cranked by hand at 'silent speed' at approximately a foot (16 frames) per second, and the new negative consisted of stretching the length to half as much again, so that it had to be projected at 24 frames per second. But hand-cranking invariably was irregular, and when we projected the first song against the gramophone record, no one could accept face and voice as belonging to the same performance.

During the following months, occasionally helped by Pearson and other sympathetic members of the unit, I cut and patched the optical print into some semblance of synchrony, sending dozens of rolls of cut print back to the optical printer, each with another copy of the stretched print, on each frame of which I had drawn one or more dots to indicate how many times the frame was to be re-photographed, or a cross to

indicate that the frame should be omitted. The devoted printer and I worked with telephones beside us, losing all sense of time, but the job was finally completed (during 1929), the rest of the film was scored, the first prints made and Pearson left for Hollywood where he faced the most sceptical audience of all time. But at least they spared the time, as they had promised, and they bought the film on the spot.

If a print of the film, to which I had given the title *Auld Lang Syne* when they could not think of another, still exists, I am sure it would reveal its origins. But it convinced an enormous international audience, who never suspected the manipulations which I had had to devise. And I went on drawing my six quid a week.

Yours faithfully,
THOROLD DICKINSON
Lambourn, Berks.

This letter reminds me of a point I neglected to make in my article. While American silent films of the 20s tended to be projected at 24 fps, European silent films tended to be photographed at 16 fps, right up to the end of the silent era, and to be projected at 20 fps.—KEVIN BROWNLOW.

Cut Copies

SIR,—One of the troubles of cinema in Britain is that the various interests involved in conserving and distributing films are unable to take a single, hard look at its position; instead we have the Wilson Committee looking at production finance one year, a section of the Williams Report the next, and someone else revising the Eady Levy. The consequence is that important aspects are overlooked because they fall outside one of these convenient compartments.

For instance, the BFI does fine work in the archival field, yet current releases are still cut by

distributors and the British Board of Film Censors entirely for short-term commercial expediency. The record shows that distributors' cuts are rarely restored; unless the film is subsequently sold to BBC-2, a point demonstrated by a recent showing of James Ivory's *Wild Party*. The nature of BBFC cuts is equally transitory, if less random, since changes in social attitudes render them pointless in a few years. Policy changes probably mean that the BBFC would cut even general exhibition material quite differently from ten or fifteen years ago. There were signs of conscience over this in Soho Square in 1975, when the Board offered to re-examine any pre-1970 material with a view to recertification. The gesture fell on deaf ears in neighbouring Wardour Street.

Clearly what's needed is some mechanism that will provide for complete archive prints of future productions, coupled with a programme to restore the worst damage inflicted on older material by the BBFC especially. Cost should not be a great problem compared with the task of changing attitudes and, to some extent, the conditions in which film distribution is carried out. This will get easier as video systems impart new commercial life to many of the dormant titles on distributors' lists. It will certainly provide an excellent opportunity for restoring cuts, and the BFI could encourage video prints to be taken from new prints rather than any old theatrical ones. In the interim, one obvious reform to the censorship system would prevent many current anomalies—to have all censorship decisions lapse automatically after five years. If distributors wanted to re-release a film, the BBFC could confine itself to a nominal fee to reviewing those reels it had initially cut.

The Williams Report stated that film was 'a uniquely powerful instrument' and gave this as a reason for continuing to censor it. It is also a reason for respecting its integrity. After all, even a humble paperback carries a declaration saying that it is complete and unabridged.

Yours faithfully,
ADAM BROWN
Focus
London W.8

Bad Timing

SIR,—John Pym's review of *Bad Timing* (*SIGHT AND SOUND*, Spring 1980) strikes me as misconceived, a misreading based on a sexist view of Milena. He sees Milena as a 'predatory' female destroying Alex, the infatuated academic. I would suggest the reverse is true.

Alex's unhealthy attitude to Milena is underlined time and again. He wants to contain her spontaneity, to subdue her and possess her. He cannot cope with her otherwise—which is why he is unable to respond to her

BFI PUBLISHING

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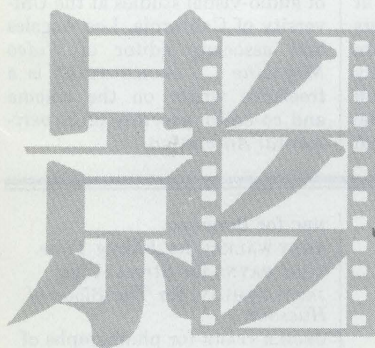
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LETTERS

approaching him at the party. He is an academic, a psychologist who needs to operate within defined parameters. Hence his uneasiness in Morocco, his sudden wish to marry her, to whisk her away to a milieu he understands. It is significant that in his glibly conceived lecture he advances the discredited theory that our first traumatic exposure to sex is in the guilty observation of our parents making love. He himself spies on Milena.

Standing before Klimt's 'The Kiss', Milena remarks that the lovers seem happy. Alex's response, which Pym sees as unconsciously prescient, indicates Alex's worm-eaten view of love (the camera shifts to an anguished painting by Munch). Milena, to be sure, is instinctive and mercurial, but she is also capable of deep emotional attachment. Alex is not. John Pym however repeatedly refers to her as an all-devouring female.

He refers to her 'voracious sexual appetite', her 'greedy ... sexual rapacity', and her 'purling desire for self-gratification'; and to Alex's 'spineless acceptance of Milena's continuing sexual relationships with other men'. Shades of Othello. In fact there is only the suggestion of one past affair (with Konrad) and one other, and the only sexual activity we see is with Alex.

This attitude makes for a gross distortion of two major scenes. When Milena, overwrought at Alex's sexual obsession, offers herself to him on the stairs, Pym interprets it as 'perversely degrading' Alex. The degradation is only in the acceptance of the offer. Then he interprets the final

rape as a 'definitive act of rejection' (having noted Milena had 'led him [Alex] such a dance it would be kinder to let her die'). Rather, I think Alex has Milena doped, pliable, her personality extinguished, and the rape is his act of dominance and contempt.

The film's coda illustrates Alex's achievement. Milena with hair symbolically short, in a uniform, carrying a scar on her neck like Alex's brand.

Yours faithfully,
 PETER GUTTRIDGE
 London, S.W.5

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

MARTYN AUTY is lecturer in Film History at London University and until recently was deputy editor of *The Movie*. Reviews regularly for the *Monthly Film Bulletin* ... STEVE BOTTOMORE is a freelance researcher at the BBC and an independent film-maker, at present writing a book on the technology of the cinema, particularly on the early days ... STUART HOOD teaches Communications at Goldsmith's College, London ... PAUL MANSFIELD is a journalist based in Athens, General Editor of Greece's only English-language weekly news magazine ... SCOTT MEEK and TONY RAYNS organised the National Film Theatre's Chinese Cinema season ... GENE MOSKOWITZ works for *Variety* in Paris ... MARTIN POLON is director of audio-visual studies at the University of California, Los Angeles and associate editor of *Video Magazine* ... CECILE STARR is a freelance writer on the cinema and co-editor recently of *Experimental Animation*.

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ON NOW

●BRONCO BILLY

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

This is the most amiable to date of the Clint Eastwood-directed parodies of his own monolithic macho persona, and the one in which the joke is easiest to appreciate. Bronco Billy, trick rider and sharpshooter, shepherds a small Wild West show round the carnival stops of America, to dwindling returns and regular desertion by the pretty girls persuaded to be his 'targets'. Billy spouts frontier wisdom to hero-worshipping children, and the film remains likeably ambivalent about the quantities of believe and make-believe in his act. Unhappily, there is also little tension in the equation, and although Eastwood stretches himself as director with elements of Capra-comedy in Billy's relationship with the heroine, a runaway heiress, he seems in the end to have let himself too easily off the hook as actor. (Sondra Locke, Geoffrey Lewis, Scatman Crothers.)

●DEATH IS MY TRADE

(Contemporary)

Shot partly on location at Auschwitz, Theodor Kotulla's penny-plain reconstruction of the life of Rudolf Höss, the camp commandant, achieves the singular feat of being neither an apology for nor a condemnation of its central character: this, it is argued, is simply what happened. Kotulla sucks us into Höss's tunnel-visioned experience of German history between the wars. A blank, hard-working 'patriot', he found it easy from the beginning to kill either on his own initiative or under orders: after the first execution, of a deserting comrade in the First World War, others followed with the unsensational predictability of falling dominoes. Based on Robert Merle's book, itself based on Höss's memoirs written in captivity shortly before his own execution, this is a convincing analysis of the psychological perspicacity of the Nazi Party and also of the sheer mundane planning behind its campaign of genocide. Disinterested in tone, the film nevertheless in the end silently acknowledges—as the camera tours the huge waste land of the camp—the enormity of Höss's crime. (Götz George, Hans Korte.)

●THE FOG (Rank)

John Carpenter's thriller, a massive financial success in the United States, has red-eyed sailors rising from the deep to slaughter six of the inhabitants of a small Californian coastal town, six of whose ancestors sank their ship a century before. The

obviousness of the film's structure and content (basically, attack after attack) is heightened by arbitrary nods to Hitchcock—the cast features both Janet Leigh and her daughter, Jamie Lee Curtis—and, in particular, to *The Birds*, with references to Bodega Bay and an implied link between the mayhem and an intrusive female presence. Carpenter fails to expand on or give any resonance to the relationship between the townspeople and the phantoms that materialise in the swirling fog, and so effectively reduces the film's *raison d'être* to the occasional moment of enjoyable fright. The chief pleasure derives from his still assured handling of the CinemaScope format. (Adrienne Barbeau, Hal Holbrook, John Houseman.)

●THE MARRIAGE OF MARIA BRAUN

(Miracle)

Rainer Werner Fassbinder takes the measure of post-war German history—its economic miracle, its collaboration with erstwhile enemies to recover its nationhood—through the emblematic history of war 'widow' Maria Braun. Maria's devotion to her missing Hermann proves to be both her undoing and the passion that keeps her going: working as a hostess in an American services club, she begins a relationship with a black soldier, just before Hermann re-materialises from captivity, and then disappears into it again when he takes the blame for the American's death in a scuffle. Maria continues her work on his behalf, taking up with a Franco-German businessman, only to have her reunion with Hermann end in another (mini-) conflagration. The parable—is Hermann the ghost of Germany past?—never really works, but the film exhibits all Fassbinder's satiric relish for Love's Labours as social and economic commodity values. (Hanna Schygulla, Klaus Löwitsch, Ivan Desny.)

●PROSTITUTE

(Connaught)

Tony Garnett's angry, polemical attack on the present confused state of prostitution and the law is a curious amalgam. An old-fashioned hard-luck story—Sandra, a Birmingham working girl, goes to London, falls prey to shifty operators, and returns home chastened—mingles with a rather restrained semi-documentary exposé of the prostitute's life, with emphasis on the lower end of the market. The film's central weakness is its diffusion: a practical lesson in the pitfalls of organising a do-it-yourself pressure group sits uneasily with Garnett's burrowing curiosity about the day-to-day business of prostitution and his tendency, simultaneously, to reinforce such clichés as that of the open-hearted whore (true or not, it still seems like a cliché). But the film is in many ways an intriguing and commendable attempt to find a commercial format for a non-sensational examination of a patently sensational subject. (Eleanor Forsythe, Kate Crutchley.)

AIRPLANE! (CIC)

The funniest moments in this parody of the *Airport* series are direct mutilations of the 'genre' conventions. The arbitrary nature of much of the rest, including burlesques of *Saturday Night Fever* and *From Here to Eternity*, is thus all the more deadening. (Robert Stack, Lloyd Bridges; directors, Jim Abrahams, David Zucker, Jerry Zucker.)

ALL THAT JAZZ (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Bob Fosse morbidly sounds his own death knell in this (heavily fantasised) auto-biopic of his personal vices and professional vicissitudes. Few insights into the work of the Broadway choreographer, and little enjoyment until the hero campishly goes to hell at the end. (Roy Scheider, Jessica Lange, Ann Reinking.)

BRUBAKER (Fox)

Despite the gruellingly portrayed violence, and a basis in fact, this is essentially an old-fashioned prison exposé. It is occasionally hinted that Warden Brubaker (Robert Redford) might not be all shining knight, but the audience has little option but to get wholeheartedly behind his cause. (Jane Alexander, Yaphet Kotto; director, Stuart Rosenberg.)

CAN'T STOP THE MUSIC

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Energetic putting-on-a-show musical purporting to present the sound of the 80s, but emerging as tired old pap, with director Nancy Walker allowing the entire cast to overact horribly. (Village People, Valerie Perrine.)

CHAPTER TWO (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

A hymn to the tenacious Marsha Mason, wife of author Neil Simon and here capably playing herself, is inserted in this thinly plotted account of how the widower Simon came to his second marriage. The film is less a crackling Manhattan entertainment than a lugubrious celebration of a 'miraculous' occurrence. (James Caan; director, Robert Moore.)

CRUISING (ITC)

William Friedkin's controversial thriller about a killer stalking the gay hang-outs of Greenwich Village has plenty to offend on its flashy, kinky surface, but inside it's quite null: coyly skirting how Al Pacino's undercover cop passes for gay and making a hash of the whodunit. (Paul Sorvino, Karen Allen.)

THE ELEPHANT MAN

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

The David Lynch who directed the enigmatic, phantasmagoric *Eraserhead* is intermittently visible in this studied biopic of the Victorian 'Elephant Man' and his doctor/saviour. Black-and-white Panavision, brilliant sound and Lynch's surrealism eating at the naturalism make a fascinating hybrid. (John Hurt, Anthony Hopkins, John Gielgud.)

THE FIENDISH PLOT OF DR. FU MANCHU

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Peter Sellers' last film, enlivened by his own inimitable double performance, stumbles between Sax Rohmer spoof and animated Goon Show. Some fair visual gags, but the invention fizzles out in a damp squib finale. (Helen Mirren, David Tomlinson; director, Piers Haggard.)

FOXES (United Artists)

American Graffiti updated, with even more pulp/comic-book adolescent trials but no mythic gestures. A peripatetic group of teenagers (all girls, without cars) tackle the problems of parents and puberty; Jodie Foster is their secular Mother Superior. (Cherie Currie, Marilyn Kagan, Randy Quaid; director, Adrian Lyne.)

HEART BEAT (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Unbelievably tedious handling of fascinating material: how Jack

Kerouac exploited his friend Neal Cassady as the Dean Moriarty of *On the Road*, and lost his own way in the limelight that ensued. Almost redeemed by Laszlo Kovacs' mutedly nostalgic camerawork. (Nick Nolte, Sissy Spacek; director, John Byrum.)

HONEYSUCKLE ROSE

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Earthy performances lend warmth and credibility to this ballad of a country & western singer torn between the lure of the road and the family at home; but over-direction persistently tips the film into lush sentimentality. (Dyan Cannon, Willie Nelson; director, Jerry Schatzberg.)

THE ISLAND (CIC)

Peter Benchley's Caribbean yarn is a case of a tried formula reworked just once too often: a 'lost', inbred crew of bloodthirsty pirates advertise themselves by floating innocently on the surface of the ocean. Director Michael Ritchie, departing from his customary tone and subject matter, seems helplessly adrift in this pulp fantasy. (Michael Caine, David Warner.)

MARIGOLDS IN AUGUST

(Contemporary)

Memorably acted by John Kani and Winston Ntshona, Athol Fugard and Ross Devenish's concise, passionate dissection of the psychology of repression in black South Africa again testifies to the power of Fugard's level, bone-weary style of address.

ROUGH CUT (CIC)

Another comic diamond-heist movie, in which someone seems to have embedded random parodies of Hitchcock. All that glitters in the dialogue, unfortunately, is not sparkling repartee, and while Burt Reynolds effortlessly does his thing, Don Siegel's touch is nowhere in sight. (Lesley-Anne Down, David Niven.)

UNE SEMAINE DE VACANCES

(Curzon)

Bertrand Tavernier returns affectingly to Lyon, even reprising Philippe Noiret's role from *The Watchmaker of St. Paul*. Simple human warmth overcomes disillusionment at the end of a young schoolteacher's 'week off'. Charming and intelligent in a very Gallic manner, if inevitably a little facile. (Nathalie Baye, Gérard Lanvin.)

SIMON (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

This first feature by Woody Allen's co-writer Marshall Brickman merely shows how far Allen has progressed between *Sleeper* and *Manhattan*. A tired satire on scientific and media power, which Alan Arkin, as the unfortunate hero palmed off as an alien intelligence by some nutty professors, cannot save. (Madeline Kahn.)

A SMALL CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

(United Artists)

Although handsomely mounted and at times judiciously distanced, this insider's evocation of the late 60s on an Ivy League campus—the Weathermen; the Mamas and Papas; the Reserve Officer Training Corps—ultimately disappears into a miasma of sentimentality. (Brad Davis, Karen Allen; director, Rob Cohen.)

URBAN COWBOY (CIC)

John Travolta lurches woodenly through a silly script that raises feminist red herrings as he browbeats his wife, only to smother him in macho glories as he masters the mechanical rodeo bull that appears to be the Texan indoor sport. (Debra Winger, Scott Glenn; director, James Bridges.)

THE VALIANT ONES (Osiris)

A flavourless rehash of *The Seven Samurai* which—apart from one sequence as good as anything in *A Touch of Zen*—is virtually one long, dreary martial arts encounter. (Director, King Hu.)

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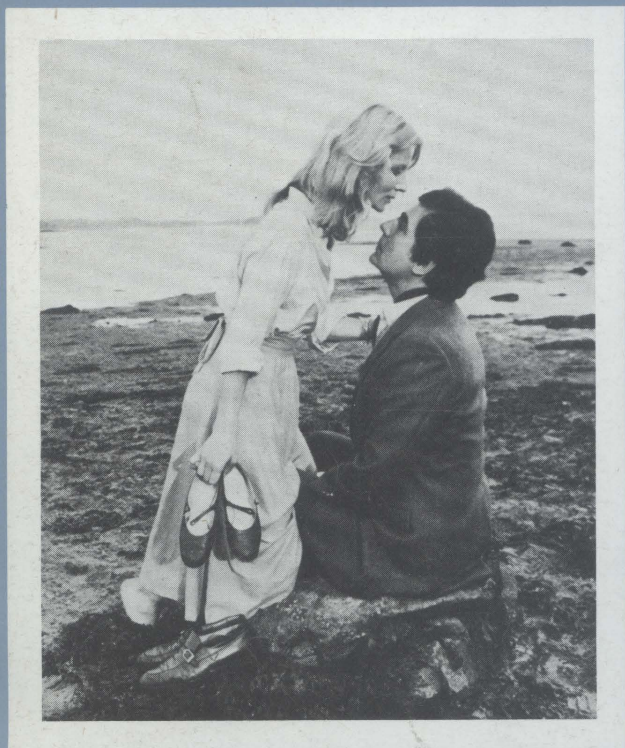
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